SCHOOLGIRLS ALBUM 1945

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1945

Illustrations by
J. McCAIL

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RIVAL SOCIETIES

BY MARJORIE NORTON

AN OLD WOODEN BOX FELL DOWN AND BROKE.

AMONG the merry crowd which filled the Fourth Form Common Room at St. Anne's School for Girls, only one person was silent and aloof, sitting by herself, looking through the window and watching the rain pelt down on the school hockey field. Sadie Raye was the new girl of the Form, and in addition to this she had very quickly found out she was the only girl in the entire middle school who did not seem to have unlimited pocket-money, tuck hampers, fine clothes, and other good things which money could buy.

She knew the other girls did not mean to be unkind when they showed their surprise a little at her own lack of luxuries, but it did hurt rather badly when she saw the jars of preserves, the cakes and tarts and fruit which the others brought out every day to liven the plain school tea of bread and butter, just as it had hurt a few minutes ago when Joyce Norman, the Form Captain, had organized a whip-round to buy a birthday present for Miss French and everyone but Sadie had been able to contribute generously to the collecting-box. She listened intently to the conversation going on in the room behind her. They were talking of the two secret societies which were run in the Form, and Sadie, along with most of the others, longed with all her heart to belong to the Society of the Georgians, which was the one of which Joyce Norman was the leader.

"There will be a vacancy in the Society this term," Sadie heard Joyce saying, and there was a wild chorus of voices asking, pleading, and begging to be allowed to fill the gap. Sadie turned and saw Joyce laughingly holding up her hand for silence.

"You know," she said, "we don't just choose our members! Each member has to earn the right to become one of us! We will see who will earn the honour by fair means!"

"There is always a vacancy in the Cecilians," Lorna Haikens said quietly. "We don't limit the number of our members!"

"Shut up, Lorna!" Paula Deane said teasingly. "We all know we could join your goody-goody society if we wanted to do so, but I for one want to join the Georgians and have some fun!"

"We're not goody-goody!" Lorna protested, her pale face flushing a little. "We only want to raise the tone of the school! We think everybody ought to help others less fortunate than themselves, and

we don't agree with all the slang that's creeping into school, and a lot more things besides ! "

" We know, we know ! " chanted Polly Friar, " but what we want to do is join with Joyce and Kath and the rest. I do think it's mean," she went on, turning to Joyce. " We all want to join with you and you won't have more than ten members, and yet the goody-goodies will have any number—if they could get 'em ! " she finished with a little smile at Lorna who rose hotly to the defence of her own society, named after St. Cecilia, and which tried to persuade its members to live sweet and unselfish lives, a very high ambition amongst a crowd of happy-go-lucky modern schoolgirls.

In a few minutes the discussion was raging hotly. Everyone, with the exception of Sadie Raye, was joining loudly in the debate, so that no one heard the door of the Common Room open and only when the penetrating voice of Miss Beatie, the new Games mistress, reached their ears, were they aware there was anyone else in the room.

" Girls ! " Miss Beatie's voice brought instant silence. " I am ashamed of you ! You are making so much noise you have not heard the tea-bell, and you have not been to wash yet ! The trouble with you all is that you are not energetic enough, except with your tongues ! Come along at once, and don't let me catch anyone loitering on the way."

In silence the Form passed along to the wash-room, and Sadie, washing her hands in the next bowl, heard Joyce whisper to Madge Bennet : " I bet she gives us extra drill or something ! She'll be the death of me ! I'll put a notice on the board to-night."

" That," Sadie said to herself as she sat down for tea, " means a notice about the Georgians. My goodness, I would like to join them ! "

" Have some of my jam, Sadie, it's lovely ! " Marie Ward pushed the jar of preserve towards Sadie with a smile, but Sadie was very proud as well as very poor. She felt the hot colour in her cheeks but she answered steadily :

" Thank you very much, Marie, but I don't care for sweet things a lot," and pushed back the jar. She felt the eyes of the others on her and tears stung her own eyes for a moment, but she blinked them back furiously. One day she would show them all, she thought, but what she was going to show them was a mystery just then.

" As it is so wet out of doors I think we will have a little morris dancing in the Big Hall," Miss Beatie was saying cheerfully, quite ignoring the groans which greeted her words. " You will need the extra exercise to loosen up your muscles. I am sure you are all stiff after your gym this morning."

" I am," admitted Phyllis Cowl who sat on Sadie's left. " I wish Miss Marrow had never been married ! She didn't work us to death with games and gym at every verse end ! "

" You will thank me for doing so one day, Phyllis ! " observed Miss Beatie, whose hearing seemed to the Form to be remarkably good. " You are all slack in games, and in consequence not as well as you might be. I mean to make St. Anne's as famous for games as it is for its grand scholastic record ! "

" We beat St. Monica's last year, for the shield ! " Joyce put in, trying to defend them all, but Miss Beatie only smiled.

" Then you were either very lucky, or they were even worse than you are ! " was all she said, and went on to talk about the coming morris dancing which sounded even more strenuous than the morning's gym had been.

Sadie sat alone and silent. Suddenly a wave of homesickness swept over her. She had lived all her life in the ancient town of Maxington, and all the other girls envied her luck in being able to go home every week-end for Sunday lunch and tea. But suddenly it did not seem enough. To-day was only Tuesday, and anything might happen before next Sunday. Sadie made her quiet resolve as she listened to the talk of the morris dancing. Miss Beatie was as new as she herself. Surely she would not be so likely to miss her as would one of the other mistresses who knew the girls in the Fourth so well ? She would slip out and run home, just for a moment, to make sure her beloved people were all right. If she ran all the way through the fields outside the town, the fields which by-passed the cliffs and ran almost to the edge of the beach, she would not see anyone who might recognize her as a St. Anne's girl, and she would be back before the supper-bell.

As soon as tea was over Sadie slipped away as quietly as she could. Because she had not yet made any special friend she was able to get away un-observed, while the others were trooping off to the Big Hall. She pulled on her school hat and coat and opened the door very quietly, then, running like a hare, she was pelting over the sodden fields and on her way home.

She raced along the path by the shore, through the wide streets of the town where the fine houses were, glancing up at the brooding shadow of Max-ington Castle where it stood, a lofty pile, at the head of the cliffs. Sadie's breath came a little quicker as she looked at it, and tears stung her eyes as, turning from the residential part of the town, she came to the narrower, darker streets of poorer houses where her people lived. She lifted the worn latch of No. 7 Calgary Grove, and went quietly indoors, tiptoeing into the shabby little sitting-room where her mother sat sewing. Very softly Sadie crept up behind that beloved figure, and put her arms round her mother's neck and kissed her.

" Sadie ! " Mrs. Raye dropped her sewing and kissed her daughter in return, adding sternly, " And what are you doing out on a night like this ? I thought Miss Tompson would take better care of my girl than to let her run out in such a storm ! "

" Miss Tompson doesn't know I am out ! " Sadie's eyes danced for a moment. " I just felt awfully homesick. I had to come home ! Where are Dad and the boys ? "

" The boys are at their scout meeting and your father is working at the library, looking up some more facts for his book," Mrs. Raye said, folding up her sewing. " I'll come back with you, Sadie. I suppose I shall have to explain." She looked intently at the girl. " You're not unhappy at school, are you, darling ? " she asked gravely.

For a moment Sadie forgot her resolve to say nothing of her troubles to her mother, and her grievances came tumbling out, one after the other.

" I'm not really unhappy," she said. " I know it's very kind of Uncle Jim to send me to school, but I can't help feeling it when the other girls have so many nice things and I haven't any, and when they talk about their fine homes and everything, and I know we ought to be living in the Castle, if we had what was right for Daddy . . ." At the sight of the pain in her mother's eyes she stopped short. " I'm sorry, Mother darling," she said swiftly. " I didn't mean to complain. I honestly feel heaps and heaps better for seeing you ! I'll get off back now, and then I'll be in well before supper-time. No," she added as her mother stood up, " I shall run all the way, and no one will see me ! " She bent and kissed her mother again, as Mrs. Raye sat down once more. " Give my love to Dad and the boys. I'll be home on Sunday for tea . . . and for lunch ! "

She did feel happier, she told herself, as she ran along the path back to school, but it still hurt badly to see Mother sitting in that shabby little room when, had fate been more kind, she would have been the lady of Maxington Castle. Maybe some day the treasure would be found and then . . . A sudden cry for help cut short her thoughts, and turning to look across the bay Sadie saw to her horror two small boys struggling in the water while an overturned boat floated near to them. Fortunately the tide was coming in, but Sadie could see that the smaller of the boys was already giving up the struggle. She tore off her hat and coat and plunged into the sea, which she was relieved to find fairly calm. She knew the bay well. Dad had taken her and her brothers to bathe there for years and years; as far back as Sadie could remember. She swam with steady strokes until she reached the boys and heaved a sigh of relief as she saw the older one had a firm grip of the boat. She signalled to him to hold on, and catching the smaller boy by the back of his collar, she began to tread water and to try and turn for the shore.

" Hold on ! " a voice shouted suddenly. " I'll be with you in a moment ! " and Sadie heard the steady purring of a motor boat growing nearer until it came close beside her and a young man leaned over the side to take her burden from her.

" Take him now," Sadie called, " I can swim back ! "

" I'll pick you up ! " shouted the man, but Sadie, now that she knew the boys would be safe, wanted only to get back to dry land and to school, to try and find some way of drying her wet things. She was shivering as she ran back through the hockey fields, but she did not even think about that. If only she could be lucky and get in without a mistress seeing her she was sure one of the girls would help her, but it was not to be. Rounding the bend of the corridor she ran into Miss Beatie, whose eyebrows went up almost to the roots of her hair as she caught sight of the dripping little figure.

" Good gracious me, child ! " she exclaimed in her most frigid tones, " wherever have you been ? "

" I—I've been out . . ." Sadie began limply, when there was a sudden commotion in the hall below, and Miss Tompson, " Tommy " to the girls when she was not there to hear them, came panting up the stairs, closely followed by the young man Sadie had seen in the motor boat.

" There she is ! " he said joyfully as he caught sight of Sadie. " And a jolly brave girl if I ever saw one ! "

" Sadie Raye," Miss Tompson asked sternly, " this young man says he saw you rescue two little boys from drowning ; is that so ? "

" I . . ." poor Sadie was beginning once more, when the young man interrupted her.

" Of course it's so ! " he said. " She was fine ! I was out for a little fishing," he tried to explain to Miss Beatie, " and I saw it all . . ."

" You told me all about it, Mr. Beddows," Miss Tompson silenced him, then she turned back to Sadie. " I do not know what you were doing on the shore without permission," she said sternly, " but I will deal with you later. For the present go to the sick bay and ask Matron to give you something to ward off any chill and then find some dry clothes. On the spur of the moment I can only say your little excursion to see your people on Sunday shall be cancelled. You must learn to obey rules when they are made for you."

" Yes, Miss Tompson," Sadie said meekly, as she turned away, quite ignoring the young man who was calling out that he was a reporter on the local paper and would see to it that her brave deed as well as Miss Tompson's injustice should be made public. Once round the bend of the corridor she found herself surrounded by her Form companions, all

CATCHING THE SMALLER BOY BY THE BACK OF HIS COLLAR, SHE BEGAN TO TREAD WATER.

congratulating her, patting her on the back and shaking her hand.

"No one else even dreamed of going out to escape Miss Beatie and her frightful exercise!" Joyce said enthusiastically. "I think you're splendid!"

"I think she ought to be considered for the vacancy in the Georgians!" put in Madge, but there was no time for more, as Miss Beatie could be heard coming along the corridor. Sadie's heart was a little lighter as she made her way to the sick bay. It was too, too awful not being able to go home next Sunday, but her first taste of popularity had been very pleasant, and if she could possibly become a member of the St. Georgians she was going to do so! The first thing she did on reaching the Common Room was to look at the notice Joyce had pinned on the board. It said that the St. Georgians would meet in the old house near the shore known as the Smugglers' House, on the following evening, to elect the new member. As she read it, Sadie's eyes brightened. Maybe after all she would be the chosen one!

Somehow the next day dragged by. Sadie was in disgrace with the mistresses which, as Joyce said, did not seem fair when she had been so brave, but apparently it was too great a crime to break rules to allow anything else to make up for it! Miss Tompson had told her that the young reporter would certainly have saved the boys without her getting wet and displaying any needless heroics, which hurt a little since Sadie had not thought of anything like that, but the praise of the Fourth and the feeling she would be the chosen one at the meeting that night helped a lot.

"If I'd been on the shore I couldn't have done anything!" put in frail Cynthia Redwood. "It's awful to be called delicate!"

"At least it gets you out of games and gym!" put in Joyce with a grin. Cynthia frowned.

"I wouldn't mind games and gym if I were allowed to do them," she observed. "Miss Beatie is hard on you all, but she despises me, and I can't help it if my heart is groggy!"

"Never mind, Cyn," put in Vera Law consolingly, "we all know you can't help it and love you just the same!" which seemed to cheer up the delicate member of the Fourth, for she was soon smiling and laughing with the rest of them.

Sadie watched the members of the St. Georgians closely all day. With the others she knew that Dot

Stevens was leaving school in a few weeks as her parents were taking her abroad with them, and this had caused the vacancy in the Society. She knew too who were the other members, and that they were taking a great risk in going to the old Smugglers' House for their meeting, since it was out of bounds, but as closely as she watched them she did not see them leave.

By the light of smuggled candles the nine remaining members of the Georgians were grouped in the lower room of the old house. Joyce was reading out the notices to her silent little circle when there was a sudden rapping on the barred door on the ground floor above them. Tales they had heard of the ghosts of the smugglers rushed back into the minds of the nine girls, and nine hearts pounded loudly as Joyce, after a little hesitation, stood up and advanced the few steps towards the door.

"Don't!" breathed Nina Wilks. "It's sure to be something awful! Let's go!"

"The Society is to make us be brave and to do daring deeds!" Joyce hissed under her breath. "If we don't open the door we've failed in our aims. We'll be as big a set of sissies as the Cecilians."

With a defiant gesture she flung open the door while the others crowded closely behind her, for, as Marie said, they might as well face whatever it was all together. Framed in the doorway stood Sadie, her hair blown about by the wind.

"I've come to put in an application to become the new member," she said as she held out an envelope. "But I couldn't make anyone hear or find a letter-box."

"Come in!" Relief lightened Joyce's tone. "None of the others had the pluck to follow us," she said, turning to the rest. "I vote if Sadie passes the courage test she's the new member!"

"What shall the test be?" demanded Sheila Briggs. "We've had nearly everything!"

"I know." Joyce sounded very impressive. She turned to Sadie. "Dare you go along the underground passage leading to the Castle dungeons, right to the bend at the end?" she asked breathlessly, knowing full well that none of the others, herself included, would have dared undertake the task she was setting Sadie. The new girl's lips tightened. She knew, even better than the others, the legends of the smugglers and the Castle, but she did not intend to be beaten.

"Wait here," she said, and added: "I have a torch. Is that allowed?"

"Of course," Joyce said, and in silence they watched Sadie go down the few steps to push on one side the locally famous sliding door and disappear into the darkness beyond. She was gone such a long time that the others began to be nervous, but at last they heard the sound of hurrying feet and Sadie, bright-eyed and with a flush in her cheeks, came running back, waving a piece of parchment in her hand.

"I stumbled and fell," she said excitedly, "and clutched at an overhanging piece of rock to save myself. An old wooden box fell down and broke, and this fell out!"

The girls crowded round and by the light of the candles they soon saw the old-fashioned writing on the yellowed paper. Sadie read the words aloud:

"If of ye treasure thou would'st share
Then of ye wizard take ye care.
For deep within his power lie
Treasures that none can e'er decry!"

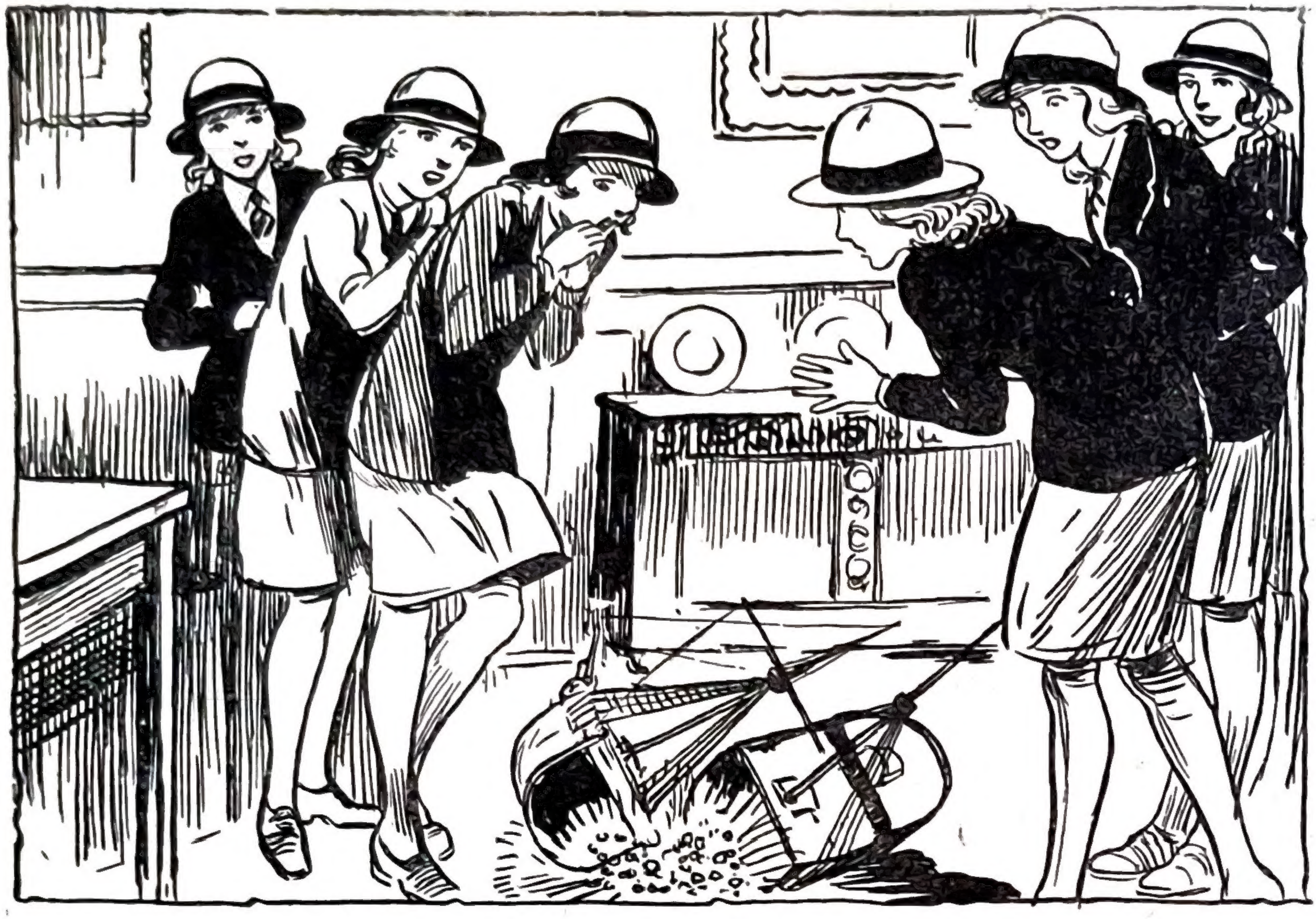
"What does it mean?" asked Joyce and the others; but Sadie knew. "It means," she said breathlessly, "that perhaps I can help Daddy after all! You see," she went on excitedly, "Daddy is really the owner of Maxington Castle. It's been in the Raye family for umpteen generations, but during the war between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers the treasure of precious stones and, I suppose, gold and silver was hidden from the Roundheads and has never been found. My ancestor was killed later and did not tell anyone where he had hidden his wealth. Daddy has let the Castle to some American millionaire, but he visits it only now and then. If we could find the treasure we could live there, and you could all come and stay if you wanted to!"

"How ripping!" Madge Bennet voiced for them all. "But I wonder what your ancestor means about this wizard?"

"I think I can guess," Joyce said slowly. "Up in the ground floor, where old Mrs. Peters shows people round and talks about the smugglers, there's a model of one of the old ships they say belonged to one of the younger sons of the Rayes who joined in with the smugglers!" She looked at Sadie, hoping she would not be offended, but Sadie knew all about this ancestor of hers and only smiled and nodded. "The model of the ship is called the *Merlin*," Joyce went on. "The old *Merlin* was wrecked on the shore so maybe the treasure will be somewhere in the model. It's a big one, under a glass case."

"Let's go and see," suggested Mary Arkwright, and with one accord they all trooped up to where the model of the *Merlin* lay under a rather dirty glass cover. With some difficulty they took it out and examined it closely, but to their disappointment there was no sign of treasure anywhere.

"I wonder . . ." Joyce spun round sharply, and in doing so she caught Sadie's arm, knocking the model out of the new girl's grasp. They made frantic efforts to save it, but it was too late. The wooden model, old and frail, fell with a crash on to the stone floor, but the cries of dismay changed to those of astonishment as the model broke into two halves and a stream of beautiful precious stones



IT FELL WITH A CRASH ON THE STONE FLOOR.

poured out on to the floor, winking in the candle-light.

"The treasure!" Joyce breathed, but Sadie was ignoring the stones and had pounced on a small scroll of parchment, similar to the one she had found in the smugglers' passage.

"More writing!" she said excitedly. "Gather round, everybody!" and she began to read what was written there:

"If other treasure thou would'st seek
Go dig about the Castle creek,
But if so be ye are no Raye
Then it be best thou keep away."

"That's all right," Joyce said, giving Sadie a hearty clap on the back, "you're a Raye, and so's your dad. You'll have to tell Tommy in the morning and ask her to let you go home . . ." she broke off as the same thought occurred to them all. How would Miss Tompson act when she heard of the meeting of the Georgians in the old Smugglers' House, out of bounds and everything?

"We'll just have to face up to it, that's all," she said. "After all, we called our Society after St. George because he was brave. We can't let Sadie down now! I vote we get back to school at once; we're later than usual. Let's hope Tommy won't cut us off the school bonfire and firework display as a punishment!" she added gloomily, for in another week it would be November the fifth, and St. Anne's School always had an extra-special celebration on that day.

"There'll be an unholy row in any case," Phyllis Cowl said as her turn came to swing through the broken window and outside. She was exactly right. Miss Tompson was furious. She was pleased to hear Sadie's good news and sent word at once to Mr. Raye and his wife, but she would not let Sadie or anyone else of the Fourth out of the school grounds at all.

"You will stay where you are," she said sternly. "But for Miss Beatie I would punish you further. She has persuaded me it is because you are not getting sufficient exercise that you have the energy for these silly exploits, so I shall leave it to her to see that you are all too tired, by school work and games, to indulge in such childishness as secret societies!"

There was no help for it. The Fourth might grumble as much as they liked, where no one could

hear them, but they were drilled and danced, made to play hockey and to go for cross-country runs until every bone and muscle in their bodies ached terribly. Only Cynthia was left out of it all, but as she said, the way in which Miss Beatie looked at her made her feel as bad as if she'd had to join in it all.

" I don't know about Miss Beatie," said Sadie as she undressed one night, rubbing her stiff legs, " I think Miss Beastly would be a far better name for her ! " From that day the name stuck, so far as the Fourth were concerned.

There was one crumb of comfort ; the celebrations for the fifth had not been stopped. For weeks the girls had saved up their pocket-money for fireworks and to make a guy, and as it was the turn of the Fourth to provide the guy this year they were all very excited about it.

" Let's make a new sort of guy," suggested Cynthia, who had been entrusted with the task of making up the dummy. " Let's make one like Miss Beastly and burn her ! "

" What a rag ! " breathed Joyce and Sadie together, while a few of the more timorous souls looked on askance. " Let's ! " And after a little scornful persuasion most of the others were won over, all but the few Cecilians, who, however, they knew would not betray them as it was against their code, too, to sneak.

Everybody helped Cynthia to gather extra wood shavings from the wood shed, and Madge Bennet secretly dyed her old summer tunic (by means of bottles of ink provided by all and sundry !) to the shade of darker blue worn by Miss Beatie. Nina Wilks contributed a blouse which her skilful fingers soon made exactly like the ones Miss Beatie always wore, and Marie Ward's old hat was soon pulled into shape to represent Miss Beatie's dark blue felt.

" I know what else we can do," Cynthia said, as she put the last touches to the stuffed figure, on the evening of the fourth. " I'll sit in place of the guy while it's carried round the field, and then I'll brandish a hockey stick so's everyone will know who it's meant to be."

" How will you change places with the guy ? " demanded Joyce above the startled chorus of " Ohs ! " and " Ahs ! "

" Easily. It's light. I can lift it off while Stella is lighting the big catherine wheels and the fire. I'd love to do it. She's has a down on me because I can't play games."

" O.K. then," agreed the others, and one and all set to work to perfect the plan. By the time the big parade, led by the guy carried in state by four Fourth Formers, went round the playing field, every detail was perfect. Cynthia let her arms dangle limply, dressed in clothes almost identical with those of the guy, and when, an old hockey stick in her hand, she sat upright and flourished the arm with the stick in it, an audible gasp went round the school assembled on the field.

" The little rotters ! " breathed Stella Lee, the head girl, as she gave a startled glance at Miss Beatie, but the mistress was smiling and evidently meant to take the jape in a sporting fashion. Stella made a resolve to get the Fourth " on the carpet " herself, and stepped forward to light the giant catherine wheels and the bonfire, thinking the jerk of the " guy's " arm had been contrived by wires or ropes. As the flames leapt up at the touch of the torch there was a chorus of praise which changed to a yell of horror. Collapsed in a heap in the chair on top of the pile was Cynthia, white-faced and unconscious. It was evident that the excitement had been too much for her, and she had not been able to change places with the guy.

The school stood as though frozen after that first yell, and then, running lightly and easily, came a figure in a blue gym tunic and felt hat. Miss Beatie, calm and self-controlled, fought her way through the flames to reach the unconscious girl, and at her heels came another, smaller figure, pale-faced Lorna Haikens, who, with her bare hands, beat a path for the mistress through the flames. They reached the grass and Miss Beatie rolled Cynthia over and over until the flames were extinguished, then she pushed Lorna over too, and did the same to her although her own clothes were already burning. Finally she rolled in the grass herself, while willing arms carried Cynthia and Lorna off to the sick bay.

Miss Tompson, a figure of wrath, came hurrying up, but after a few words with Miss Beatie she went away. Joyce and Sadie, standing close by, heard the Gym mistress pleading to be allowed to handle the matter her own way, to appeal to their " sportsmanship," and felt very much ashamed of themselves. The clear voice of Miss Beatie rose over the babble of voices.

" Girls ! " she called, " carry on ! I'll speak to you in the Big Hall after supper ! "

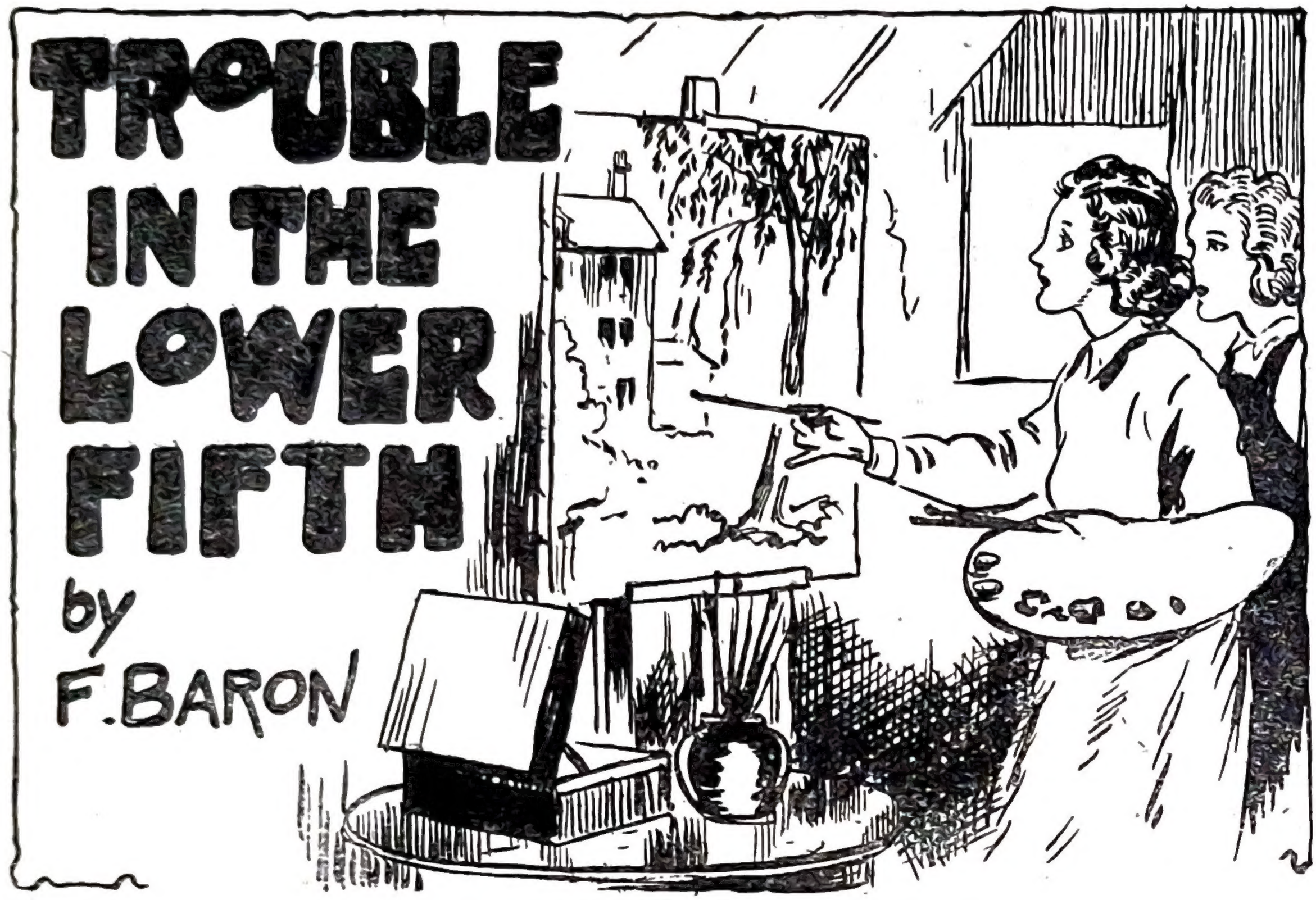
There were rousing cheers and the evening passed merrily, but before the school trooped into the Hall, the Fourth were there, waiting for Miss Beatie. As the mistress came in Joyce stepped forward.

" We'd like to say thank you for being such a sport, Miss Beatie," she began humbly, " and for saving Cynthia . . ." She broke off. It was not an easy task, but Miss Beatie laughed lightly.

" That's all right," she said, " but you all stood like statues to-night. When I've done with you, you'll run to the rescue automatically when you see something is wrong." She looked round. " I know all, or nearly all, about your rival Societies," she said gravely, " and while the one has helped Sadie's father to obtain his rights I cannot help thinking such rivalry is wrong in itself. Why not let us ask

Miss Tompson to let us form School Guides, have a few patrols, and have friendly, sporting rivalry in future, instead of all these funny secret societies? What do you say?"

The Fourth's answer was unmistakable, and as Miss Beatie found herself carried shoulder high round the Big Hall to the tune of "For She's a Jolly Good Fellow!" she seemed very sure the one-time unpopular mistress of St. Anne's was well on the way to be front-rank favourite at last.



. . . A SIMPLE PICTURE OF THE SCHOOL GARDENS.

CHAPTER I

"WHERE are you off to, Iris?"

"Down to the gates to post this letter," said Iris Bently, grinning back at her chum, Ruth Cosgrave. "Nowhere out of bounds, my dear, so you need not fear the Black Monk will play any haunting tricks on me."

"Monk, my foot," said Ruth. "I'm not worried about the old Monk. But you might slip along to the Art Room and tell Emily we are holding up rehearsals for her."

"The play must be perfect for breaking-up day, and not even the Derwent Art Scholarship must stand in the way," chirped Iris, and then she fled as her chum hurled a book along the passage.

Iris sped down to the gates, and popped her letter into the post box. Then she dodged through the shrubbery on her way to the Art Room.

The Art Room was a place on its own, and had really been an outbuilding, until the Head Mistress had had it converted for the use of her more artistic pupils.

To reach it one had to go past the old abbey ruins, on whose site St. Hilda's had been built. The ruins comprised part of the abbey that was still standing, together with a labyrinth of vaults that were reputed to stretch for miles beneath the school.

How far this was true no one knew, for the vaults had been placed strictly out of bounds, and the entrances sealed.

As Iris passed the ruins, she gave a fleeting glance towards them. Although it was early, evening was already closing in, and Iris's thoughts were fully occupied with visions of the big fire in the Lower Fifth Common Room, and the rehearsal for the forthcoming play.

It was certainly not of the ghost of the Black

Monk, the fabled Monk of St. Hilda's, that was still said to haunt the ancient ruins, that she was thinking.

Then she saw something half-hidden behind a ruined archway. It was the figure of a monk in a long black robe, with the hood shielding his face. She saw it for just a moment, and then it disappeared.

"Crikey!" gasped Iris. She did not pause to investigate, but streaked across the grass to the Art Room, and banged open the door, letting in the first sprinkle of raindrops.

"Emily. I've seen the Black Monk. Don't look like that. I have really. He was hiding in the ruins," said Iris, in a rush of words.

"I'm not looking any special way," said Emily, eyeing Iris sceptically. "But I know you couldn't have seen the ghost of the Black Monk, because there are no ghosts. And I don't see why anyone should go fooling about the ruins this time of the evening."

"It *was* the Monk. He had on a long black robe, and he was in the same spot Nora saw him in the other day. I don't believe in ghosts, either, but I do believe in burglars," said Iris.

"Let's go and see," said Emily, whipping off her smock, and casting it over a chair. Then she put on an old mac she kept hanging on a peg, and glanced out of the window.

"Nasty night for either ghosts or burglars," she said, opening the door, and next moment she was hurrying beside Iris to the entrance to the abbey.

"Not a soul in sight, so confess you must have been mistaken," she shivered, after they had scouted around without success. "And the rain isn't doing our complexions any good, I'll bet. I feel as though I were a block of ice."

"That's because you stayed so long in the Art Room, though goodness knows what you could have been doing in this light," grumbled Iris, who did not know whether to be glad or sorry she had not found the Monk.

"Guess I was day-dreaming," smiled Emily Murray, and then she gave a squeak, for Iris took hold of her arm, and pinched it hard.

"Look," pointed Iris. "Something ran out of those trees. It has gone towards the Art Room."

She began to run and Emily ran with her. They saw a light suddenly stream out across the grass, then darkness fell as a blind was drawn. Iris pelted on, grasped the door handle for a second time, and jerked it open.

IT WAS THE FIGURE OF A MONK . . .

What she expected to see she could not have said, but the sight of Miss Marsden, the Head Mistress, was too much for her.

She gulped, stuttered, floundered, and grew red in the face, while Emily commenced to giggle foolishly.

"We thought—I saw—I mean—that is, we saw someone come in here," stuttered Iris.

The Head gave them both a keen glance.

"I came over to see Emily's painting. I have heard a lot about it from Mr. Stone, the Art Master," she explained. "It really is a fine piece of work, though you will have all your work cut out, Emily, to beat all the schools in England that are entering for the scholarship."

"I know," said Emily, and she came and stood beside the Head, while Iris looked over her shoulder at the painting.

It was a simple picture of the school gardens, with a tall laburnum holding central place, but the strong, sure strokes, and the artistry in the focusing of the light upon the tree's golden tassels, betokened work out of the ordinary.

"It's equally as good as the painting you were doing in the hols when Ruth and I visited you, and that you did not finish," said Iris, forgetting for the moment all about the Monk.

"What are you girls doing out in the rain," said the Head, after a pause. She turned to Iris, and frowned.

"No pranks," she said. "Remember the Lower Fifth are on probation. If I have any more trouble from that Form I will disband it."

"Yes, Miss Marsden," replied Iris meekly, and she followed the Head back to the house like a lamb.

But once in the Lower Fifth Common Room her tongue unloosed.

"I saw the Monk," she announced to Ruth and the assembled girls, and proceeded with her tale.

"If it's not a ghost, it's a burglar," she finished. "I think it's up to us to catch him."

"Last night you said the Monk was all hooey. Why should we believe you any more than Nora," sneered Monica Rowland, casting a dark look in Emily's direction.

"My dear, Emily has nothing to do with this, she didn't see the Monk," said Iris sweetly, as she intercepted the glance, and Monica's face darkened still more.

She had had no liking for Emily since the latter had come to the school six months before, a shy, dark-haired, and spirited newcomer.

Before Emily's arrival Monica had been one of the most popular girls in the Form, but first it had been hockey, then painting, in which Emily had proved her superiority, and it was gall and wormwood to Monica's pride that a newcomer should supplant her.

Perhaps only Emily guessed that the fires of resentment would have died down long ago if Madge Evans had not been near to keep them ablaze.

But Emily was determined not to be the first to make advances.

"I think we should go to Miss Marsden about the matter," said Nora, trying to pour oil on the troubled waters.

"No fear," said Ruth. "I still think you both imagined you saw the Monk. Anyway, we'll investigate that to-morrow. But I know now what will happen if this tale gets to Miss Marsden's ears. She will think we are up to some jinks again, and that may be the end of the Lower Fifth."

"I don't want to be put into a lower Form," said Monica, shaking her curls.

"We should still see about it," said Iris doggedly. "Miss Marsden would never forgive us if a burglar came in the night and stole the silver and stuff. And you know there are a lot of valuables always lying around."

"Then let's form ourselves into a sort of Detective Club, and keep a lookout for anything suspicious," said Ruth, her eyes beginning to kindle, and had Miss Marsden been there she would have known there was mischief brewing, on the spot.

Forgotten was the rehearsal. The girls all clustered about Ruth, who was the leading light of the Lower Fifth, and mainly responsible for landing that Form into numerous scrapes. Even Monica forgot her animosity, and linked arms with Madge and Ruth.

It was quite a surprise when the supper-bell rang, and Rose Charters, the School Captain, poked her head round the door, and said: "What are you lot up to? I've heard nothing but giggles for the last hour. No mischief, mind. Remember what the Head said."

"Do we have to be reminded continually of that?" asked Ruth blandly.

"Don't be cheeky," said Rose. "Cut along to supper. Oh! and I have a message for you all. Miss Marsden wants berries for preserves, so you are all to go blackberrying to-morrow. Get your cans; and we are to have lunch in an old farmhouse on the moors."

"Cheers! A picnic," cried Ruth. "Thank goodness Miss Marsden is a preserve fanatic. This may be our last outing of the year."

"And might wake up that slacker," said Rose, nodding at Eva Foster, who was curled up in a chair sucking toffee, as usual, and who had been the only one to take little part in the evening's discussions.

Eva's main object in life appeared to be to keep out of trouble, and to have plenty of candies to chew. She did not even look at Rose as the Captain spoke, but went on slowly chewing.

" Eva's hopeless," grinned Ruth, and off she trooped with her friends for cocoa and biscuits, which were served on the buffet system, each girl going up for her allowance, and eating it in whatever place she pleased.

Soon it was time for bed, and the Forms scampered upstairs. Monica and her special friend Ursula Jennings, with Madge Evans and Nora Pilbrook, were the first upstairs.

The Lower Fifth did not sleep in one dormitory like the Third and Fourth; they had six little rooms opening off one passage, and in each room slept three or four girls.

The rooms were very pretty, being known as the Blue Room, the Yellow Room, the Green Room, and so on. One of Monica's chief grievances had been that when Emily first came to St. Hilda's, she had been given the bed belonging to her friend Ursula, in the Green Room.

Ursula had been away ill at the time with pneumonia, and Madge had sneeringly referred to Emily usurping Ursula's place. But that had been months ago, and Ursula had come back to the Green Room, and now Emily ' dug ' with Ruth and Iris in the Blue Room.

Rose Redgrave, the School Captain, always saw to lights out, and soon her footsteps could be heard in the passage, and her cheery voice calling, " Lights out, girls! Hurry, you slackers! "

Emily clicked out the light, and in a few seconds was snugly wrapped in bed. It seemed only a couple of minutes before she was awakened by a hand shaking her urgently by the shoulder, yet it must have been round about two o'clock in the morning.

She sat up, rubbed her eyes, and blinked in the light of a candle. Iris was standing by her bed, wrapped in a dressing-gown, hair on end, and a solemn, scared expression on her face.

" He's here," she said to Emily. " The burglar's here. I can hear him moving about downstairs."

" Look here, Iris, don't be such a silly beggar," began Emily crossly, and then she stopped.

There came a crash from the downstairs regions, and then the sound of a scramble.

Emily squealed; she could not help herself, and Ruth opened her eyes.

" What's up? " said Ruth.

" Sssh! It's the Black Monk," whispered Iris. " He has just made the most terrific clatter down below."

" Let's investigate," said Ruth, who had plenty of energy, even at two o'clock in the morning.

Soon the three were creeping downstairs.

" Don't things look different," shivered Emily. " All kind of creepy, and forbidding."

" Things generally do at two o'clock in the morning," hissed Ruth, who would not have admitted she was scared for the world, and that a solitary candle-light did not make her feel any braver.

There was a sound of movement in the kitchen, and they stood stock still.

" I told you so," fluttered Iris. " There he is."

" Girls. Vat is ze matter? Vy are you out of bed, zis time of night? "

" Oh lor! that's torn it," groaned Ruth, looking up and fixing her French mistress with a glare. And then she jumped, for there was a loud clatter of dishes, and then crash, thud, and the sound of breaking crockery.

Mademoiselle had hysterics. The candle she was clutching flew from her hand, and missed Emily's head by a hairbreadth, and Mademoiselle put a hand to her heart, and shrieked with all her might.

" Now she's done it," cried Ruth. " She's scared off the burglar," and with a rush she reached the kitchen. A second later she had opened the door.

Two green lights made towards her. Something spat and hissed. Iris gave a screech, and yelled, " Oh, my leg! You beast! " and past them streaked Timmy, the school's black cat.

By now Mademoiselle's yells had awakened the whole school. Rose was one of the first down, and behind her came the Head, switching on lights as she came.

" What is the matter? Is anyone hurt? " she called.

" Now for it," groaned Ruth, and proceeded to tell how the noise had awakened them.

It was fortunate for the Lower Fifth that all about the kitchen were signs of wreckage. Broken dishes lay in confusion. As it was the Games mistress glared, grunted, and muttered.

" That Form again. They are always at the bottom of everything that's going on."

But even she could not deny the existence of the broken crockery, or the big scratch on Iris's leg that had been Timmy's parting souvenir.

" Well, to bed, everyone. This mess can be cleared up in the morning," said Miss Marsden, when the excitement had died down a bit, and the school trailed off to bed for the second time that night.

As she climbed into bed Iris took one look at Ruth's face, and forbore to mention the name of the Black Monk.

" But something must have disturbed the cat," she muttered to herself before she drifted off to sleep.

CHAPTER II

It was not until after tea on the following day that the loss of Emily's picture became known. The school had come back from blackberry-picking, shiny faced and bright eyed, with numerous bramble

THE CANDLE SHE WAS CLUTCHING FLEW FROM HER HAND.

scratches, but feeling no end happy, and as hungry as hunters.

Tea was a hilarious business, and when it was over, Emily was leaving the dining-hall with Ruth and Iris, when Rose came up, with a worried frown crinkling her brow.

"Emily," she began, "I've just been to the Art Room, and I don't see your painting there. Where on earth have you taken it?"

"I haven't taken it anywhere," said Emily, in surprise.

"Then someone has," said Rose sharply. "For the picture isn't in the Art Room. Make some enquiries, Emily, while I inform the Head."

But all enquiries led to a dead end. Miss Marsden had all the Forms assembled in Big Hall, but all her pleas as to who had taken the picture were met with dead silence.

"Very well," said the Head at last, looking very stern. "The guilty party will not escape punishment. A big thing like a canvas is not easily hidden. I will wait until to-morrow morning for the person to own up. And from to-night the Art Room will be locked except when pupils are working there."

Agog with excitement the school trailed out.

"What a mean thing to do," said Ruth. "Everyone knows how much we are all counting on Emily romping home with the scholarship, not to mention Emily herself. I call it downright cruel."

"But who would do such a thing?" said Iris. "It was pretty late when Emily and I were in the room last night, and there wasn't much time between then and the school going on the picnic this morning. And Rose discovered the picture was missing soon after tea."

"Plenty of time for someone to sneak the picture," said Ruth. "And that someone must have a pretty bad grudge against Emily to do such a thing."

That was the general verdict of the school, and it was not long before one name began to be whispered openly as that of the culprit.

For next morning the painting was found lying beneath one of the Lower Fifth bathroom windows, almost hidden among a clump of shrubs. By this time it was just a sodden piece of canvas on which the oils were smeared into one another in a horrible blurb, and to the coloured canvas still clung torn strips of brown paper.

Evidently whoever had taken the picture had

wrapped it in paper before carrying it away, and the paper had stuck to the wet oils.

Emily did not say a word when she was called into the Head's room, and Miss Marsden patted her sympathetically on the shoulder. She just stared at the horrible mess, swallowed hard once or twice, and then darted from the room.

She did not want sympathy, kindly though it was meant. All she thought of was the picture, and behind that the thought that someone hated her so much they had gone to such lengths to do her an injury.

When she saw her chum again, Iris herself was close to tears.

"B—buck up, old dear. E—everything's not lost until it's won, or whatever the saying is," she gulped. "Can't you start another picture?"

"With the competition so near at hand?" asked Emily bitterly. "No, I couldn't. It's too late now. And if I had won the scholarship it would have meant a year in Paris and a year in Italy under the best masters. I never dreamed anyone could be so wicked."

"I do hope Monica is found out soon. If only we had some proof of her guilt," burst out Ruth, who was near at hand.

"Monica!" said Emily, in surprise.

"Yes, Monica. *She* spoiled your picture, Emily. It's obvious. She hated you the moment you set foot in the school. Who else would have done it?"

"Madge," said Emily.

"Madge! She would never have had the nerve. You are on the wrong track there, Em. It was Monica all right," said Iris.

"Monica may dislike me, but she is open in her dislike. She would not stoop to such a mean act as stealing my picture," said Emily, and she grew quite red in the face in her haste to deny the accusation against her enemy.

"Thanks, Emily, but I don't want you to stick up for me, and I don't mean that in any nasty way," said a voice, and there stood Monica, her dark eyes burning with rage as she glared at Iris and Ruth.

"You have known me long enough to know I wouldn't do such a thing," she cried. "But go on. Say I did it. Tell Miss Marsden. When she knows how I have treated Emily she will accept it as proof of my guilt as you have done. Go on. Why don't you tell her?"

"Because you are talking like a silly ass," said Emily shortly. "You didn't spoil my picture I feel sure, but I would like to find the one who did."

"Then you need not look further than Monica Rowland," someone snapped, and there was a titter among a group of girls who had drifted up during the argument.

Monica spun round, and several of the group faded discreetly away. One never knew what Monica might do in a temper.

That night at supper Rose came up to the three chums as they drank their cocoa, and sat down beside them.

"What's this I hear about Monica?" she said.

"If you mean about Monica taking my picture, you may be sure it isn't true," said Emily, giving the prefect a straight look from her clear grey eyes.

"H'm. Anyway that's not what I have come to see you about. Is it a fact that you have a picture at home that is nearly finished, that you began in the summer hols?"

"Why, yes," said Emily.

"Then why on earth don't you finish it, and enter it for the competition."

"Because I don't feel like painting," said Emily glumly.

Rose looked at her.

"You ungrateful little wretch," she said slowly. "After Mr. Stone doing his best for you, and nearly having a stroke when he heard what had happened. And the Head is prouder of you than the whole school put together. You little horror, you."

Emily listened in amazement to this outburst, then a broad grin spread over her face.

"I get you, Rose," she said, grinning. "I'll send a telegram off to-morrow to Dad to send it along."

And so, in a couple of days a parcel arrived containing the painting. It was a sketch in water-colours, and showed a wood with a stream running through it, the water dashing in white cascades over boulders. On the further bank stood three larches, their tops bathed in golden light, looking like three sentinels of the woods. Only Emily knew the work that was still involved in the finishing of it, but she secured permission to go ahead until it was done.

All that week Emily painted, and on the Saturday following the arrival of the picture, she knew that it was complete. Tired, but happy, she put away her things, and glanced out of the window.

How pleased the Head would be, and Iris, and Ruth, and Rose, and scores of others.

Emily knew the second picture was good; better, she believed, than the one that had been destroyed, and as she stood there looking out of the window, wondering if the mystery would ever be cleared up, she saw a figure dart from the trees and make for the abbey ruins.

"Madge," thought Emily.

During the past week she had forgotten all about the mysterious Monk. In fact, no one had mentioned him since the loss of the picture. Even Iris seemed to have forgotten him.

But there was something surreptitious in Madge's movements that awakened all Emily's suspicions. Could the Black Monk and Madge be one and the same?

She rushed to the door, and ran to the ruins, but not a sign of anyone could she find.

"Madge must have heard me coming and gone back to the school," Emily concluded, and very slowly and thoughtfully made her way into the schoolhouse.

A dozen girls immediately ran towards her.

"Seen Monica?" they asked breathlessly.

"No. Why?"

"Well, she's gone. Done a bunk! Couldn't face up to being found out about the picture," said one important-looking damsel. "I bet she has gone home, and a good riddance."

"If Monica has run away she will be expelled," said Emily.

She ran to her own Common Room, and found it in a state of hubbub. The news of Monica's disappearance was on every lip.

"Running away proves she is guilty. When Miss Marsden gets to know of it, she will expel Monica right away," said Ruth.

"That's right," agreed Laura Knight.

For once Eva Foster was not sucking toffee. She had been listening open-mouthed to the discussion, and now she turned round and fixed Madge Evans with an accusing stare.

"You can't let her be expelled," she quavered. "You really can't. I've kept silent long enough. I thought you would speak when you saw how things were going against Monica. I did not want to be mixed up in any bother."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked Ruth, while Emily gave a swift glance at Madge, who had been pale enough before, but who now went white as a sheet.

"Ask her," Eva sniffed, pointing at Madge. "She knows what I mean. I was up the night Timmy made such a rumpus in the kitchen. I had a bad toothache, and went downstairs for something to ease it. I saw Madge. She had been out, and was creeping back with Emily's picture."

"That's not true," said Madge, licking her dry lips.

"Oh yes, it is. Probably it was us being down disturbed Timmy. Because when I had gone to bed again, I heard him prowling round. And then came the crash, and the whole school was roused."

"Then prove it," said Madge. "Even if you did see me, how do you know I carried the picture?"

"I have proof that you did," said a quiet voice.

So absorbed had the girls been in the scene, they had not noticed the door open and Monica appear. In one hand she held a monk's black habit, carefully folded, but now she switched it open, and disclosed some pieces of brown paper rolled inside, and adhering to the brown paper were smears of paint.

"I remembered Iris and Nora saying they had seen the Black Monk," explained Monica. "And this afternoon I went to the ruins hoping to pick up some clue. I thought the Monk might have some connection with Emily's picture. I found these, stuffed in between some stones."

She looked at Madge.

"It was you who took Emily's painting," she said. "I think you had better confess."

"Confess to what?" said Madge defiantly. "An old monk's habit proves nothing. Anyone could have put it there."

"The brown paper bears your name, and must have been on a parcel addressed to you," said Monica. "I have been into the village, to old Mr. Pearson's property shop. He remembered hiring out the habit to one of the St. Hilda girls. And he said when he saw her he would know her again."

Madge collapsed like a pricked balloon.

"I didn't mean to do it," she snivelled. "I only meant to give Emily a fright, and put her picture back in a day or two. Miss Marsden kicked up such a fuss that I tried to get it into the Art Room before it was locked, but I found the paper had stuck to the oils."

"So you dropped it out of the bathroom window, and let Monica take the blame. I've heard of some bright specimens, but none to beat you," said Ruth, in disgust.

"Don't let anyone know. Don't give me away," wailed Madge.

But there was no need for anyone to say a word, for Rose came along to see what all the noise was about, and her sharp eyes spotted the monk's robe right away.

Little more need be said. Madge was not publicly expelled, but her parents were advised to take her from the school.

One morning, soon after the competition entries had been sent in, Monica came up shyly to Emily, and held out her hand.

"I've been a perfect pig to you, Emily, and I'm very sorry," she said.

Emily shook hands warmly, only too pleased to let bygones be bygones.

Several weeks after that there was quite a celebration held in Big Hall, for Emily's picture had walked away with the coveted Derwent Scholarship.

"I knew it all along," said Ruth sagely. "St. Hilda's was bound to come out tops, and the Lower Fifth in particular. Now, what about funds for a dormy feed?"

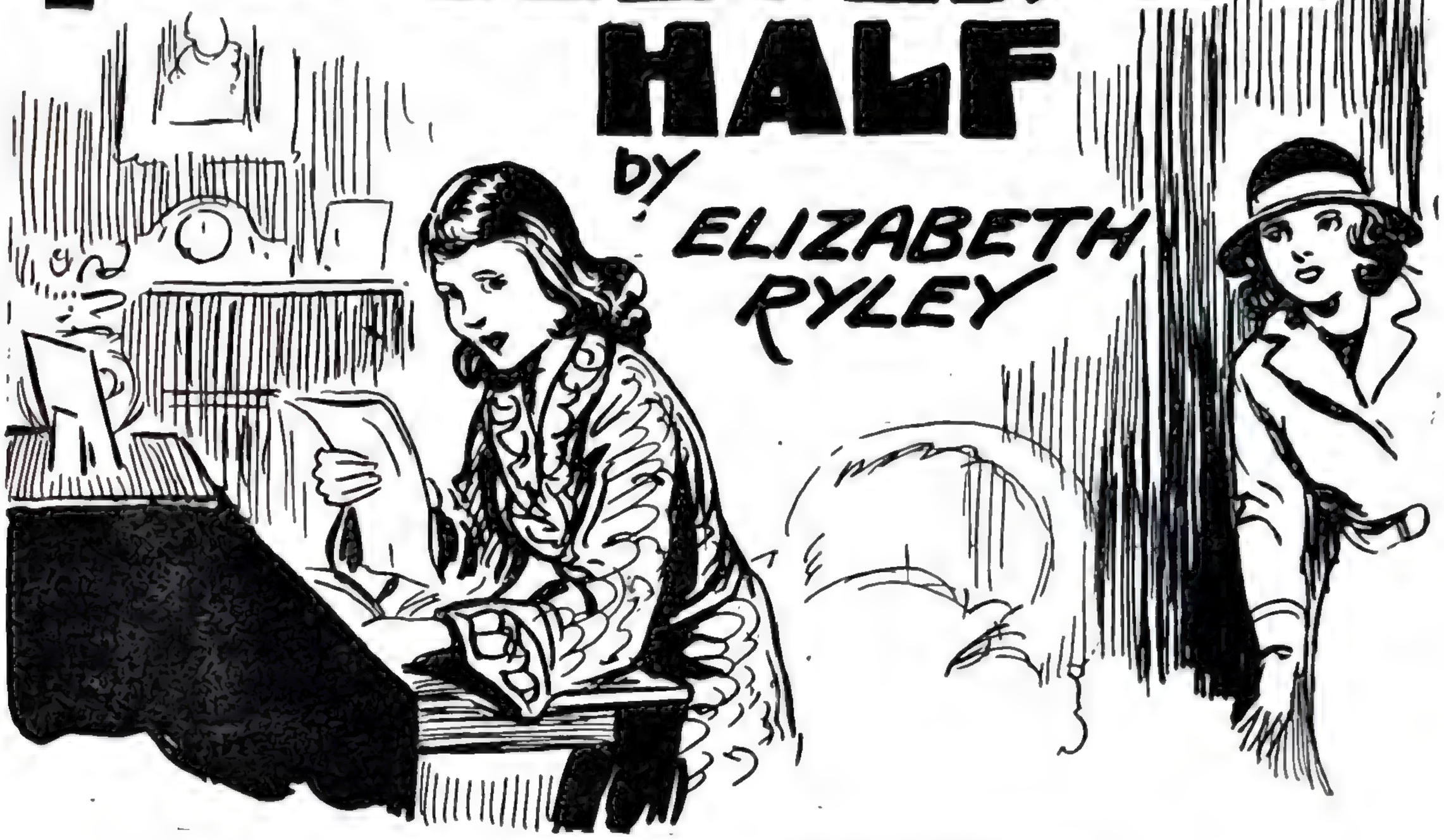
If the authorities heard more than the usual noise that night proceeding from the Lower Fifth quarters, they wisely turned a deaf ear and a blind eye. Even the Games Mistress just contented herself with muttering:

"That Form again! When will those girls learn sense?"

And if Ruth had heard she would have replied: "I hope we never will."

TOO CLEVER BY HALF

by ELIZABETH RYLEY



. . . SAW HER GO THROUGH THE QUESTION PAPERS.

CHAPTER I

Queen of the Gym

THE long french windows of the gym at Fellmoor School were wide open to the moorland wind, and standing about in groups the girls of Form V were waiting for the arrival of Miss Jillibrant, the Gym mistress. Leaning against the frame of the central window Ella Gray was chatting gaily with her two special chums, Cis Allendale and Lottie Drayton. The three of them were generally to be seen everywhere together and were commonly known as the Trio.

"What ho, my hearties!" Ella said suddenly. "Look at our Clarissa. For once she's deigning to talk to someone outside her own swanky set."

"You know why, of course?" said Cis. "She's just found out that Jill Edwards has a cousin or someone who's a producer at Hollywood."

"Jill's lovely, isn't she?" said Lottie. "And a perfect wow at gym. She's a sport too, in every way, and jolly proud of the gipsy blood that runs in her veins."

"So should I be, if it meant being a perfect dancer, a clever gymnast, and brimful of vim and vigour like Gipsy Jill. By the way, Clarissa Bolding still seems to have her knife into that new girl, Daphne Merron. I like her, don't you?"

The other two nodded as they looked across the gym at a tall, slim girl standing alone by the vaulting-horse, looking rather wistfully at the various chattering groups.

Seeing that look, Ella Gray sauntered over to her and said with a smile, "Are you keen on P.T.?"

Daphne gave a little jump. "Er—P.T.? Oh yes, yes, of course, Physical Training. Yes, I love it, but I hadn't done much before I came here. I was brought up in a tiny village on the east coast where there was only one small private school."

"Well, you'll find we're jolly well equipped at Fellmoor. And if you ask me, from what I've seen of your efforts, you're going to be a shining light in this department. Here comes Miss Jillibrant."

The Gym mistress was a cheerful young person, and with a comprehensive smile all round, she clapped her hands for immediate silence. "Limber up!" she cried as she ran lightly to the farther side of the room. "'Shun! Form fours!" And the next minute every girl was going through the few conventional exercises with which the gym session

always began, to loosen their muscles and expand their chests.

"Good!" she cried, after ten minutes. "Now for some fancy work! Who's for the trapeze?"

Jill Edwards ran forward eagerly. "May I?" she asked, her beautiful brown eyes sparkling with excitement and her red lips parted, showing her strong white teeth.

"Up you get, Jill! Someone give her a shoulder!" Then the Gym mistress set the others at the vaulting-horse, the dumb-bells, the rope ladder, and the various other equipment with which this up-to-date gym was furnished.

After a few minutes everyone's attention was focused on Jill who was doing the most daring feats on the trapeze, first sitting on the bar, then standing, and finally, after clinging on with her hands, still swinging the trapeze to its full range, she suddenly hoisted her legs upwards and over the bar, and to everyone's breathless amazement, swung head downwards gripping the bar with her toes.

"OOOO . . . OOOH!" The sound of many indrawn breaths filled the air, and some of the girls felt the palms of their hands getting moist. After a few seconds, Jill righted herself, allowed the bar to come to a standstill, and looked down smilingly.

Miss Jillibrant waited until she had leapt lightly to the floor, then putting her hands on the girl's shoulders, she said quietly: "Don't do that again, Jill. I daren't take the responsibility."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Miss Jillibrant. I've done it ever since I was a child if ever I've had the chance. I'm as safe as houses, whichever way up I am!"

Everyone laughed, but Miss Jillibrant repeated her order, adding: "I know it's second nature to you, Jill. I think you must have been born to live in trees."

Half an hour later, when the class filed out of the gym, Jill ranged herself alongside Daphne Merron and took her arm. Already a friendship was growing up between them, and Clarissa Bolding watched them with a dark look.

As the weeks slipped by, this friendship grew closer, and by the time half-term came round, it was an accepted fact that Daphne and Jill were chums. Neither of them went away for half-term, as their homes were too far away. But as there were several other girls at the school too, the time passed happily.

Everyone knew that Clarissa Bolding was going home to her grandmother's house in London for the half-term holiday, and some of them were a little tired of hearing about the number of servants that were kept there, and the gay time that Clarissa always had.

On the first evening of her return, she made straight for Jill Edwards, and ignoring Daphne, who was sitting on Jill's other side, she said excitedly:

"I don't suppose I shall stay at school after this term. My grannie will probably be taking me to America for a holiday trip in the New Year." Then she peered round Jill and looking straight at Daphne, she said: "My grandmother's name is Mrs. Lamford."

"Oh yes?" said Daphne quietly.

"So what?" cried Jill gaily. "Are we supposed to know something about her?"

Clarissa shrugged her shoulders with exaggerated carelessness. "Oh no, of course not," she said. "But I just wondered if Daphne happened to have heard the name before."

Daphne stared at her in amazement. "No," she said. "I've never heard it before."

Lessons began in dead earnest the next day, for at the end of the term the yearly examinations loomed large. First came a literature lesson, and once again that dark look came into Clarissa Bolding's eyes as she listened to Daphne Merron's musical voice reading a passage from Shakespeare. But after lunch that day, when she saw a letter handed to Daphne by the prefect in charge, a smile curved her lips as she watched Daphne turn to Jill with a happy smile.

"From my brother Edgar," she said. "I haven't seen him for quite a while. He's been staying with some friends."

Jill's expressive eyes softened, for she knew that Daphne was an orphan, and that she did not remember either of her parents. But directly Daphne's eyes had scanned the first few lines of her brother's letter, the smile left her lips, and Clarissa, watching her like a lynx, smiled still more cruelly. Jill, too, noted the change in her chum's face, but she did not ask any questions. Perhaps in good time Daphne would tell her what the trouble was. But the days went by and Daphne said no more about her brother.

As autumn crept on, the days became colder and the sun seemed to have retired for ever. This was the kind of weather in which Jill seemed to shrivel up like a flower that cannot live without the sunshine. The days were grey and gloomy, and to Jill this drabness was terrible. She loved colour and sunshine, and though she tried very hard to be as bright and happy as she had been during the summer and the brighter days, she seemed unable to prevent herself from getting depressed and hysterical.

Though Daphne had her own worries, she tried very hard to cheer Jill, but nothing seemed to do her any good. She even seemed to lose her interest in the gym.

And then one day, in the middle of a history lesson, Daphne was sent for. A visitor had come to see her. Jill looked up with a smile, hoping that

perhaps it was her brother and that he had brought good news of some sort. After the morning session was over, Daphne dragged Jill off to the visitors' parlour and introduced her to a handsome elderly gentleman.

Jill smiled up into his face as she held out her hand, and said: "I know who you are, Genter Keane, the actor."

"Why, yes," he said with a smile. "I am indeed flattered that you recognize me. I'm only a very small candle in the Hollywood firmament."

"But you've been in several productions lately," said Jill, her eyes dancing with excitement. "I've a good memory for faces. And I see a good many film papers. My cousin, Phil Edwards, is a producer in a small way."

"Well, that's fine. We're all buddies together, because, you see, I've known Daphne since she was a tiny baby."

That afternoon Genter Keane gave the two girls a thrilling time, taking them in his car to the nearest town, where they attended a cinema, and afterwards had late dinner at the hotel where he was staying for a fortnight.

He had obtained permission from the Head for special leave for them, and at ten o'clock delivered them safely at the school door. During their absence the news had flown round about Genter Keane and his association with the flicks, and the next morning at brekker the Trio nudged each other with delight as they watched Clarissa's jealous expression when she listened to the account of yesterday's gaieties.

The following night there was a social evening at Fellmoor, and Genter Keane was an honoured guest. He danced well although he was not young, and the girls found him a merry companion. The Trio were again very amused at Clarissa's behaviour. They knew she was as keen as mustard on the flicks, and they remembered that she had hinted more than once that during the trip to America in the New Year, about which she was always talking, she meant to gate-crash Hollywood.

"I bet she'll make a bee-line for Genter Keane as soon as she gets the chance," said Ella, and her two chums agreed. But to their surprise, it was the other way about. Very soon after his arrival, the film actor singled out Clarissa for particular notice. He not only danced with her, but seemed to be very interested in her conversation. After that, as the Trio said, there was no holding her.

For days she lived up in the clouds, and before Genter Keane's holiday was over, she was assuring everyone that now it would be perfectly easy for her to get interviews when she once reached Hollywood, because she had some valuable introductions.

"He's been a dear to me," she said, "telling me the ropes. Of course I know he's an old friend of Daphne Merron's but she's so mopey these days, and her chum Jill Edwards is just about as bad; you can't wonder he didn't take much interest in either of them."

Certainly Daphne and Jill were not at their best these days. Some secret worry was eating at Daphne's heart, and Jill seemed quite unable to get back her health and good spirits in the dreary weather that continued from day to day.

Clarissa Bolding seemed to be not only much more cheerful and boastful than ever, but suddenly she began to work like a nigger at her lessons in preparation for the yearly exams, which were now very near. And in proportion to her spurt of energy, Daphne, to everyone's surprise, grew lazy and apparently quite indifferent as to whether she came top or bottom of the Form-list.

One evening, as Clarissa sat during rec with a history book in her hands, her lips moving silently, her attention completely engrossed, Lottie Drayton said as she passed by:

"You *are* being the studious maiden these days, Clarissa. What's bitten you? You used to be the chief drone in the bee-hive."

Clarissa looked up.

"I'll tell you a secret," she said. "A lot depends on this year's exams for me. Grannie's beginning to get fed up because I'm always at the bottom of the list. But this year I mean to show her!"

"So's she'll be sure to take you out to America, I suppose?"

"That's the idea—more or less."

There was a queer air of mystery about Clarissa as she spoke, and Lottie was puzzled. But she was still more puzzled a moment later, when Daphne happened to stroll by.

"Hello!" Clarissa sang out. "Who's the drone these days? But even if you work till all's blue now, Daphne, I dare you to beat me at the winning-post! It'll be more than your life's worth."

The words ended on a laugh, but there was an undertone beneath them that everyone in the rec room felt. A sudden hush fell on them all, for somehow there seemed to be some kind of threat lurking behind those apparently joking words.

Jill Edwards' dark eyes were fixed intently on Clarissa's face, and a little frown appeared between her eyes. Clarissa looked straight back at her, then with a laugh, she said: "That sounded like a gipsy fortune-teller, didn't it, Jill?"

CHAPTER II

Denounced as a Cheat!

Nearer and nearer crept the exam period, and to add to everyone's misery, there came news that a travelling circus had just come to the town and

was pitching its tents in a large field on the outskirts.

"Oh me, oh my!" sighed Gipsy Jill. "What wouldn't I give to be free like those circus performers? What do they care what became of Charles I or whether Paris stands on the Seine or the Danube? I love the very smell of a circus."

Her words were sighed out in the rec room and everyone looked up and smiled at her outburst—that is, everyone except Clarissa, who was so absorbed in the pages of a geography book that she didn't even seem to have heard.

As it happened, she was the only one facing the door of the room, so she was the only one who saw the Head walk in. She had taken to making sudden and unexpected visits to classrooms and the rec room more frequently lately, and each time she found Clarissa working like a slave, and to her surprise, Daphne idling. At first Daphne had been such a hard worker, but now she seemed to have lost all interest in every subject on which she would presently be examined.

Walking now to the middle of the room, the Head said brightly:

"As you know, girls, I am a firm believer in the proverb that 'All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy' . . . and I think a little break wouldn't do any of you any harm. This is Friday. Any of you who care to do so may put down your names for tickets to be booked for Monday afternoon at the circus which I dare say you have heard has just come to the town."

"Oh, thank you, Miss Taber," came in a chorus of bright voices, and Miss Taber went smilingly out of the room.

Immediately the door had closed behind her, Jill Edwards shut her algebra book with a bang, threw it into the air, caught it, and did a whirlwind dance all round the room. When Monday afternoon arrived, she was the first to be ready and waiting in the hall for the others to join her in the walk to the circus ground.

As they hurried along they met several of the townsfolk going the same way, and at sight of the Big Top, and the smaller tents grouped about it, Jill broke into a run. Throughout the various items she craned forward eagerly, her eyes sparkling, and her slender legs moving in rhythm to the roll of the drums and the syncopated music of the gay band that added to the breathless delight of the acrobatic turns, and the amusing antics of the trained animals, not to mention the absurdities of the paint-bedaubed clowns who ran along the low barrier in front of the people, rolled about like wheels, and prodded each other at odd moments.

"Let's ask to go round to the stables at the back," Jill whispered to Daphne as the performers paraded round the arena at the end. "They'll generally let you if you want to."

"We must ask Miss Jillibrant first," Daphne whispered back. The Gym mistress smilingly gave permission, and ten minutes later, they were wandering about among the graceful horses behind the scenes. Whenever Jill stroked one of them, a quiver of pleasure passed through the sleek body, for in some mysterious way they knew she loved them.

She stayed for a long time beside the lovely little roan that the Circus Queen—as she was called on the bills—had ridden barebacked, resting her dark head against its flowing mane and talking in soft whispers into its twitching ear.

"You love my little Nut Brown Maid?" a low voice said close beside her. Jill lifted her head and turned round to see the Circus Queen herself standing there in a trim dark brown costume.

"Yes, I love her," Jill replied. "And I believe she loves me, too."

"Yes, my little Nut Brown Maid will not let everybody stroke her, but you . . . she thinks you belong . . . do you?"

Jill looked into the circus rider's eyes and nodded. "Yes," she said. "You and I are of the same race. I have gipsy blood in me."

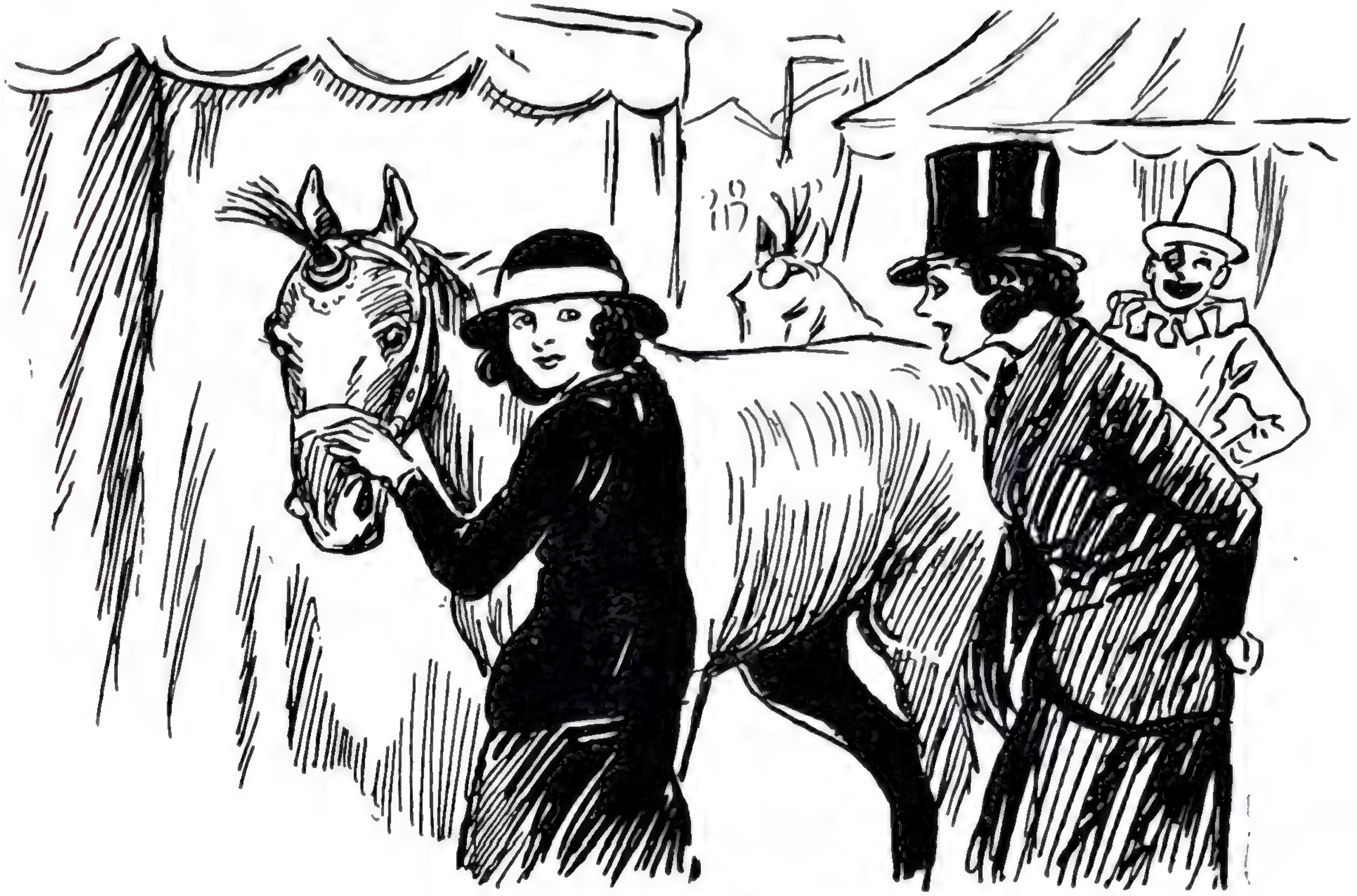
The Circus Queen nodded her head slowly.

"Your mother must have loved you," she said; "as I love my own little daughter who, like you, has dark brown eyes and black hair. But she is ill, very, very ill, and I cannot be with her. She is forty miles away from here. If it were not for the final parade this evening I could catch the last train and spend the night by her side."

"Oh, what a pity!" Jill cried. Just then she heard Daphne calling her from outside. Her brown eyes glanced from the doorway to the Circus Queen, and she turned and whispered something very hurriedly into her ear. The next minute she was running as fast as her long slim legs would carry her to join the others.

The next day she was so much more cheerful than she had been for a long time that Daphne decided that the visit to the circus must have done her a world of good, banishing the dumps from which she had been suffering all through the gloomy winter weather, and even making her forget her anxiety about the exams, which were to begin on Thursday. But Daphne herself seemed still to have lost all desire to work, and the Trio wondered why Clarissa seemed so triumphant every time she looked across the prep room and saw Daphne never even turning a page of any book.

When prep was over and everyone was chattering nineteen to the dozen as they swallowed their "coke and dough"—otherwise cocoa and bread and butter—before going to bed, Ella Gray heaved a big



"YOU LOVE MY LITTLE NUT BROWN MAID?"

sigh. "What a life!" she murmured. "The Spanish Inquisition isn't in it. Why can't Miss Taber let the exams. begin at the beginning of a week and go straight on, instead of leaving us to stew in our own juice over the week-end thinking of all the bloomers we made on Thursday and Friday, and all the others we're going to make on Monday and Tuesday? Prolonging the agony, that's what it is."

"I suppose the idea is not to over-tire us—give us a breather, so to speak," said Cis Allendale.

"Well, all I know is I'd rather get it over and done with at once. Then I could say to myself, 'What's the odds? It's over and done with and nothing can be done about it.' Instead of which I bet I shall work myself into a frenzy over the week-end thinking what a dud I've been and probably shall be on Monday and Tuesday. I'm made that way. I'd rather make a mad rush and get things over than stretch them out and have time to think."

Clarissa had strolled over to join the Trio and now she smiled in a superior sort of way.

"But you can't always choose for yourself, can you?" she said, turning to Daphne, who shook her head, and suddenly bolted out of the room.

The Trio glanced questioningly at each other, but no one made any further remark.

The next night, Wednesday, the girls heard that Miss Taber had been called to London on business and would not be back until the morning, but the news did not make much impression. Most of them were too engrossed with thoughts of the next day. Only Jill seemed to be completely carefree and happy, and Daphne was beginning to be really puzzled at her air of suppressed excitement.

That night there wasn't as much talking as usual in the West Dorm where the Trio slept, and Clarissa did not invite any of her friends into her bed-sitter at the end of the dorm as she sometimes did. Everyone settled down to try to sleep directly the silence-bell went. But after some time—how long she did not know until she heard eleven o'clock strike from the nearest church clock—Ella Gray awoke suddenly.

She had been sleeping very lightly, and as she sat up and looked about, she wondered if any of the others were also awake. But everyone seemed to be fast asleep. Then she heard an unexpected sound—someone singing softly and apparently doing a bit of floor-sweeping at the same time. It couldn't be

one of the maids sweeping the corridor outside at this time of night!

She held her breath and listened again. Why, it was coming from Clarissa's bed-sitter, and the voice was Clarissa's too. What on earth——? Flinging back the bedclothes, Ella was just going to investigate when she realized it was no concern of hers if Clarissa liked to do a spot of housework in the middle of the night! Wonders would never cease! Clarissa not only the busy bee at prep-time nowadays, but also the conscientious amateur housemaid! Ella giggled quietly to herself, slipped down into her bed, and was soon fast asleep again.

Breakfast the next morning was a gloomy meal, but Ella managed to find time to tell the tale of Clarissa's energy of the night before, and her two chums were much amused. Then everything else was forgotten in the anxieties of exam-time. By Tuesday it was all over, and until the end of that week there was very little conversation about anything except the exam subjects. On Saturday morning the results were announced, and Clarissa Bolding was easily top of her Form, the others nowhere. Daphne was half-way down the list and Jill bottom, but unashamed.

In the midst of the chatter at rec time Genter Keane called to see Daphne. As she shook hands with him, she said gravely:

"I'm most awfully sorry, because I know you persuaded my relations to send me to this school, but—but—well, I've let you down. I'm nearly at the bottom of my class-list.

Genter Keane held her hand in a kind clasp and smiled down at her. "Well, well, cheer up!" he said. "There are worse troubles at sea. You haven't had such a good chance as most of the girls. How about your friends—Clarissa Bolding, for example?"

There was more anxiety in his voice than Daphne had expected, then she remembered that he had seemed to be very interested in her. She looked up and said very quietly:

"She's top—and not only that, but miles above Lottie Drayton, who's second. She's—she's done brilliantly. She's been working very hard lately, of course."

"Has she? I thought she was a bit of a slacker at lessons?"

"Not lately. Everyone says she's changed this term."

"Oh!" The reply was brief, but there was such a strange note in his voice that Daphne looked at him in surprise. He gave her no time to say anything else, but patted her hand and said he must be off. He'd only called in passing.

Later on that morning Miss Taber called the whole school together in Big Hall and addressed each Form separately, congratulating those who were top and giving a general summary of the year's activities. When she reached Form V she looked down smilingly at Clarissa.

"Well done, Clarissa!" she said. "I am more than glad to see that you have made up your mind to show us what you *can* do, especially as this is your last term at Fellmoor."

Under cover of the clapping that followed, Cis Allendale whispered to Lottie Drayton, "Clarissa must be clever after all!"

"Too clever by half, if you ask me," Lottie replied. "I can't help feeling there's been some hanky-panky somewhere."

Ella Gray was just about to join in the conversation, but the clapping suddenly ceased as a clear, high-pitched voice sounded through the large room. Everyone turned to stare at the doorway, where Jill Edwards' tall figure stood as still as a statue. It was her voice that had broken in on the din of clapping.

"I have something to tell you, Miss Taber," she was saying the next second. "I denounce Clarissa Bolding as a cheat!"

Each girl drew in her breath, and it seemed as though a cold wind swept through the room. Then all eyes were turned on Clarissa who seemed for a moment to shrink back, her eyes darting this way and that like a rat in a trap. But the next second she threw up her head and smiled.

"You must be mad, Jill Edwards!" she said. "Because you're bottom of the list you seem to have lost your senses."

Then she tried to push her way forward, her body shaking with rage. "I won't stay here to be insulted before the whole school!" she said. "Let me pass! Let me pass!"

"Yes, let her pass, girls!" Miss Taber said. Hurrying forward, she reached Clarissa's side and walked beside her. Beckoning to Jill, she bade her join them, and as the three of them passed out of the room, a babel of voices broke out. Everyone felt that there was some sort of mystery in the air, and though a few protested that it was perfectly clear that Jill was jealous, the majority felt that this explanation was not sufficient.

CHAPTER III

The Truth at Last

Meanwhile Miss Taber had conducted the two girls into her sitting-room. Closing the door quietly behind them she pointed to two chairs that faced each other at the farther side of her desk, and seating herself between them, she said quietly:

"You have made a terribly serious accusation

" THAT'S WHAT YOU HEARD, ISN'T IT, ELLA ? "

against a fellow-pupil, Jill, and unless you can prove it, I shall have no choice but to expel you."

Jill lifted her head proudly. " I can prove it, Miss Taber," she said. " But first of all, I have a confession of my own to make. For three nights last week, I went out of this building secretly at half-past ten and did not come back until just after eleven."

Miss Taber stared at her in amazement, and because her eyes were fixed on Jill, she did not see that Clarissa's face had gone ashy-white.

" You—*what* ? " Miss Taber gasped.

" I went out at night without leave . . . to the circus." She paused, and Miss Taber was too horror-stricken to speak. Then Jill went on : " I see now that I ought to have asked permission, but I was so afraid, so very much afraid, Miss Taber, that you would refuse it. You see, the girl who is called the Circus Queen, had told me that if only she could get someone to take her place in the final parade of the performers at the end of the show, she could catch a train which would take her to see her sick child and stay with her for the night. She knew that if the child could live through those three nights—Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday—she would be well in time. So I took her place for those three final parades."

Clarissa's voice broke in :

" Really, Miss Taber, I can't see why I should have to sit here and listen to Jill's account of her own good deeds . . . if she *did* spend the time as she says."

" I'm coming to that," said Jill. " You see, Miss Taber, on the last night—Wednesday—I saw Clarissa climb through this window behind me and creep into your room. I watched her lift the lid of your desk, and I saw her go through the question papers—which you will remember had been roneo'd off and brought here by the mistress of each Form. Clarissa had a pencil and paper, and I saw her jot things down."

" That's a lie, a complete lie ! " Clarissa shouted. " I was up in my own room that night. I couldn't sleep, so I suddenly decided to tidy my room. I forgot that the girls in West Dorm would probably be asleep, and I'm afraid I hummed a song to myself. As a matter of fact, Ella Gray heard me. She told me about it the next day, and I apologized."

Miss Taber moistened her lips and looked from one to the other, completely bewildered and shocked. One of the two was lying. Then she rose and rang the bell, and when one of the maids answered it, she said:

"Please send Miss Ella Gray to me."

Silence reigned until Ella appeared, wondering what was in the wind. When she was asked about Wednesday night she nodded. "Yes, that's right," she said, and told the story of waking up and hearing Clarissa in her bed-sitter.

"*Now* do you believe that it is jealousy on Jill Edwards' part that has made her concoct this story, Miss Taber?" Clarissa said, her words coming with breathless eagerness. Miss Taber hesitated, for she had herself noticed that she had left her window unlatched during that night she had been in town. Before she could make any reply, Jill rose.

"I can explain why Ella *thought* she heard Clarissa in her room, Miss Taber," she said, "if you will wait here a moment."

Clarissa opened her lips to speak, but no words came. She stared at Jill as she walked across the room and disappeared, and while she was gone Clarissa's face once again went chalk white.

Five minutes later Jill returned with her portable gramophone, and at sight of it, Clarissa jumped to her feet and made for the door. But Jill stood with her back to it.

"Please stay, Clarissa," she said. "I'm sure this record will interest you."

A grim silence held them all as they watched Jill open the case and put on a record—and then across the room came the sound of Clarissa's voice humming a gay little tune to the accompanying swish of a carpet-broom. Ella looked from one to the other in amazement. "That's what you heard, isn't it, Ella?" Jill said. Ella merely nodded, too mystified to speak.

"Clever, eh, Clarissa?" Jill asked. "You see, when you went to the box-room in the dark and thought you'd slipped this record into your trunk, you didn't really do so. You put it down *outside* the edge of the trunk . . . and I found it there. I tried it out, wondering whose it was. And, knowing a little about screen-test methods, I wondered if by any chance Genter Keane had advised you to have this done. I managed to put a telephone call through to him, and he told me all I wanted to know: that you'd worried him to help you to get on the films; that he'd told you he couldn't do very much; that in any case, it wasn't up-in-the-air antics that most producers wanted, but real human things; that someone was looking for a second Deanna Durbin; and that the best thing you could do was to think up something that would record your singing voice and at the same time show whether you could behave *naturally*; and that finally he had helped you to have this record made. But he never dreamt you would use it as you did—to cover your tracks, and try to prove that you were in your room when in reality you were somewhere else."

Clarissa suddenly put both her hands over her face, and her head was bowed. Presently she lifted her head and faced Miss Taber.

"It's all true, Miss Taber," she said. "And there's more than that to it. You see, Daphne Merron and I are cousins, only she does not know it. Her mother married an actor and they went to America. Genter Keane was their friend. He knows about my being Daphne's cousin. Mrs. Lamford is Daphne's grandmother as well as mine, and when I found out—by listening at a keyhole—that Daphne was to be given a chance to prove whether she was a worker or merely idle and frivolous, as Grannie said I'd become, I determined to put a spoke in her wheel. I could see that I shouldn't have half as good a time in the future as I'd expected if she was allowed to share everything with me."

She paused a moment, but no one interrupted. Then she went on:

"Daphne has a brother, younger than herself. Last half-term he called on Grannie, and I happened to see him first. I guessed who he was, and arranged that it should seem he stole some money of Grannie's that was lying about. I pretended to Grannie that after all it wasn't to be wondered at, but that the best thing for her to do was to drop him. I told Daphne he was a thief, and if she didn't agree to let me beat her at the end of the year, so that I could prove I'd been working, I'd denounce her brother to Genter Keane who had promised to take him back to America and treat him as his own son. Rather than spoil her brother's chances, Daphne agreed. But even though I really did swot for the exams I knew I shouldn't get anywhere, because I'm a dud at lessons. Then came the chance of seeing the question papers. I happened to pass round this end of the lawn soon after you'd gone to London, Miss Taber—and—and—well, you know the rest."

. . . . . .

Form V didn't relish having to go through another set of examination papers, but guessing as they did that Jill Edwards' accusation against Clarissa was true, they submitted without a murmur, and when the results came out, with Jill a little higher up than before, Ella Gray top, and Daphne Merron second, they were all pleased. Clarissa had already disappeared from their midst, and all they knew about her was that she was going to prepare to earn her own living as a secretary.

A TEST OF COURAGE

BY C. H. FALCON

SNUBBY GRINNED IN A FATHERLY WAY . . .

"JOAN, you will please rewrite your history essay and never offer me such a disgracefully prepared piece of work again." Miss Radford gathered up her books and sailed from the classroom.

Joan Murray thumped with her elbows on her desk and clutched her straight fair hair in her clenched hands.

"The old beast," she muttered. "Just because she has one of her silly liver attacks, she has to take it out of us. People like that oughtn't to be allowed to be teachers. Education in this school's all wrong anyway," she added with sudden conviction, and swung round to face a sympathetic class. Being near the bottom of her Form, she had to turn about to see the other girls. "I ask you, where does an essay on George I's relations with his ministers get you these days? Who cares a hoot about his old ministers anyway? And how does thinking and bothering about them help you to prepare yourself to get a job and keep it, in present-day conditions?" The school had been having a series of lectures on topics of current interest: "The Labour Market with Special Reference to Women," "The Future of Education," and similar subjects.

The classroom was rapidly emptying as the girls ran out for the mid-morning break, but freckle-faced Mona was still banging books and pencils into her desk.

"I agree," said Mona loudly. "What's the good of all this talk about the new education when people like Miss Radford are still about? There isn't a hope for any newer education."

Mona was short, rather fat, and had dimples. One couldn't imagine anyone taking her views on modern education seriously; yet Mona took herself seriously. She might change her opinion fairly frequently according to the latest utterance of Joan or Pamela, but she had an opinion on most matters for most of the time.

At this moment Pamela Bryce shoved a book into the bookcase, turned and raised both arms above her head, clasping her fingers together, and yawned loudly. It was her signal to the gang. It meant she had an idea. Joan, Mona, and dark-eyed Susan at once became violently busy. Mona took her exercise-books out of her desk and flung them back again. Susan began to hunt under her desk for a non-existent pencil. Joan hummed a song tunelessly.

In two minutes the last of the girls had rushed

out for " break " and biscuits, and the room was in sole possession of the four friends.

" What you said about present-day education being all wrong, Mona, is correct," began Pamela, swinging Miss Radford's chair from behind her desk and sitting down astride it. " The grim fact is that if we don't look out, we shall have left school before all these new ideas about education have gone beyond the blue-print stage. Then for the rest of our lives we shall rank as women of the pre-modern age."

Her listeners looked glum.

" Well, saying so isn't going to help us," remarked Joan.

" Miss Sainsbury is fairly up-to-date," conceded Mona generously. Miss Sainsbury was the Head mistress and acknowledged even by the school to have certain enlightened moments.

" Oh, Sane's not too bad," admitted Pamela. " But she's hampered like—like a ship smothered in barnacles, by a fossilized staff."

" Well, Pam, what's the big idea ? Buck up and tell us or all the biscuits will have been eaten."

" The big idea is that we have to help ourselves ; no good waiting for the staff of this school to put modern ideas into operation." Pamela paused and stared out of the window, a remote look in her grey eyes. " You know that new boys' school, Heath School ? "

" Yep."

" Well, I was talking to Snubby yesterday ; you know, he's that curly-haired, snub-nosed boy. We were waiting in the sweet-shop, and he told me that their Head believes in training character and citizenship through adventure, things like sailing boats and going on expeditions. They do all kinds of exciting stunts, and they're counted as lessons, with the result that the boys do about half the number of hours' bookwork that we have to do. That is their Head's interpretation of the new education. Seems pretty sound to me."

" You'd never get Miss Radford to see sense in it though," objected Susan dismally. Susan was tall and thin ; indeed every time the girls were weighed and measured, Matron said Susan didn't seem to have any flesh at all on her bones. She had eyes which appeared in most lights to be jet black, and hair which from being constantly brushed upwards now stood more or less permanently upright.

" Who's going to ask Miss Radford's co-operation ? " demanded Pamela. " If there's anything to be gained from the plan, we have to work the scheme out for ourselves. The first thing would be to get hold of Snubby and hear details. I wasn't listening properly when he was talking yesterday. I was willing the queue ahead not to choose peppermints because they didn't look like lasting till my turn."

" It's a wizard idea," said Joan enthusiastically. " What you mean, Pam, is that we plan our education on modern lines and leave Rad and the rest guessing."

" We'd be pioneers," babbled Mona breathlessly, her face beaming. " People would talk about us in years to come as the girls who were strong enough to fight opposition and—and——"

" No one's ever going to talk about you in after years," said Joan crushingly. " You're too much like a cushion——"

" Shut up, you two," said Pam, " and talk sense. Shall we waylay Snubby coming up from the cricket field this afternoon ? "

" Yep."

" No. What about my rotten history essay ? " asked Joan.

" Oh, forget it," said Pam airily. " Do it in bed to-night. I've a new battery in my torch. I'll lend it you."

" You can't write history essays under the bedclothes," grumbled Joan.

Nevertheless, late that afternoon the four girls had taken up positions in the lane leading from the boys' playing fields. Mona precariously sat astride a fat oak branch which overhung the lane.

The boys straggled past in twos and threes on their way to their school house. They took no notice of the girls.

Snubby came late in the procession and walking alone. Mona threw a twig at him as he approached her perch. He bent down, picked up a stone, and made the gesture of casting it in return.

" I say, we want to talk to you for a moment." Mona swung one leg over the branch intending to drop lightly and neatly to the ground beside him. Largely because of her plumpness, she lost her balance early in the movement so that she practically fell out of the tree and landed on hands and knees. It hurt a bit, but dignity came to her assistance and she stood up smiling, as if she had intended to finish up in a sprawling attitude.

Snubby grinned in a fatherly way and said : " You be careful or you'll be doing yourself some damage."

" Snubby," said Pamela, joining the group ; " you don't mind us calling you that, do you ? We don't know your real name, and we heard one of the boys calling you it. We want to hear about the educational system at your school. We're interested in new ideas ; and have an urge to get away from systems which have been in operation since the year dot."

Snubby nodded his head understandingly. Snubby was shorter than any of the girls, Mona included, but he was a born organizer, and this gift made up for any lack of inches or even athletic prowess. Snubby, said the other boys, always knew the answer—or thought he did ; whether it was a simple matter like what the weather was going to do, or a

more complicated affair like the reactions of some master in given circumstances.

Snubby said now, leaning nonchalantly against the big bank. "Well, I haven't long. Our tea's at 5.30. But what is it you want to know?"

"These stunts and things you were telling me about yesterday. What exactly is the object."

"Character training," said Snubby, choosing a delicate piece of grass and commencing to chew it. "You see, what most adults lack is initiative and—and the ability to take responsibility and cope in an emergency. Heath School boys won't be like that."

"Who says adults can't cope in emergencies? Some of them can," defended Joan, who disliked Snubby's superior attitude, and thought his statements much too sweeping.

"I said the majority," declared Snubby reprovingly. "Of course some can. My father, for instance——"

"Go on, Snubby," Pamela interrupted him. "You said you hadn't much time."

"At our school," said Snubby, "we are given opportunities to test our initiative and our reaction in emergencies. We have a standard at which all except the complete duds are aiming. It includes things like physical fitness and reliability. Self-discipline is another thing the Old Man is terribly hot on. You know, not smoking, and bearing minor ills with fortitude; those are his own words. Expeditions into the hills are arranged, and we have our fleet of boats, because you can learn a great deal fighting the elements in a boat. Sometimes we go off for over-night expeditions, two of us together to start with, but before you leave you do an expedition on your own. As far as boats are concerned the Old Man believes in our learning through our mistakes. If you do something silly, well, probably the boat capsizes, and you all get chucked in. But as we have to wear life-jackets in boats, no real harm's done; it's pretty foul though, going in on a beastly cold and wet day."

Susan said: "I don't see how all this can help us. Oaklands hasn't a fleet of boats, and Miss Sainsbury would throw forty fits if we went off on an expedition and stayed out all night."

Snubby looked judicial.

"What you girls want to do is to start in a small way. Know what you're aiming at, and then make a stand, and be absolutely stoic about the pain and inconvenience the standing firm involves, see? It'll lead up to other things."

"We know already what we want," said Joan; "and that's not to spend the best learning years of our life on useless things like essays on George I and other dead-and-gone blokes."

"There's something in Snubby's idea," remarked Pam slowly. "Thanks, Snubby, for your suggestions. We shall of course have to think things over; and now I'm afraid we shall have to do a sprint for home—we've lashings of prep to do to-night." Pamela had no intention of being organized by Snubby.

"O.K.," said Snubby. "Glad to help you any time."

"You see," continued Pam, as the girls, having parted from Snubby, strolled leisurely across a field which the owner had induced Miss Sainsbury to put out of bounds since he was rearing his young poultry stock there. "What we must do first is draw up a plan of action." Pam thereupon sat down on a chicken coop regardless of the squawking of the hen imprisoned in it, and pulled out a notebook and pencil from her blazer pocket.

"Now, under the heading 'Adventure,' we'll include stunts which we'll plan, like the boys going out in boats."

"How can we?" asked Mona doubtfully, and with a touch of nervousness. She received a withering look from Pamela and a punch in the chest from Joan.

"There's nothing we can't do if we want to," Susan told her.

Inspiration suddenly descended on Pamela like a shower of rain in April. "I tell you what, we'll have another heading called 'Education,' and we'll make a list of the lessons that we think absolutely useless as a means of fitting us for life in the present-day world, and we'll take a stand: we'll just refuse to do them."

A long drawn-out "Ooooh!" from Mona which started somewhere in the depths of her fluttering heart was snapped off short before more than the first syllable had escaped from her lips.

"Yes," agreed Susan, her eyes alight, her pale little face animated; "and bearing the consequences will be a test of guts, like Snubby said."

They all looked at her. There was undoubtedly something of the martyr in Susan's make-up.

"We'll put that down under the heading 'Character,' showing the way character is developed in our system of training," said Pamela practically.

"It sounds marvellous," said Joan. "Do you think I ought to make a start by refusing to do my history essay over again?"

Pamela considered, biting the end of her pencil. "We hardly have the scheme worked out yet. I think you'd better do that and we'll start afterwards."

Mona could not contain herself any longer. "But aren't we going to get into an awful lot of rows?" she queried diffidently.

The others looked at her with long-suffering patience.

"My dear little mutt, we are not intending openly to defy authority. We are going to work subtly, like underground movements if you like. But we

are going to be prepared to stand up for our opinions whatever it costs, see? That's where you train your character. It'll do you a lot of good, my poor babe. You may even grow a bit under our system."

"Shut up teasing, Pam," said Joan, seeing that Mona looked like bursting into tears or a fit of rage. The ringing of the school bell borne faintly to them on the wind put an end to any further discussion just then. They took to their heels and raced like hares for the gap in the hedge, and school.

Joan's statement that Miss Radford was suffering from a liver attack was nearer the truth than she knew. That same afternoon Miss Radford went to see her doctor, but he, a reserved man, explained little, merely talked about a further examination, so that Miss Radford, also reserved and shy of asking questions, left his consulting-room feeling worried. Not unnaturally her anxiety found outlet in her reactions the following morning when she was faced with Joan's rewritten history essay.

Writing under the bedclothes by the light of a torch after lights-out is not conducive to good work. Furthermore, Joan had fallen asleep before the essay was finished, so she had been forced to scribble the last page whilst dressing, and since she had only awakened when the rising bell rang, the work was distinctly hurried.

Miss Radford studied the exercise, and her hands holding the book began to tremble. Joan, sitting at one of the front desks, was near enough to see this reaction. From experience she recognized it as a sign of indignation.

Miss Radford dropped the exercise book on her desk with a gesture of intense distaste. She looked up and proceeded to tell Joan that never, never in all her years as a teacher had she been so insulted as to be offered work such as now lay before her.

Joan rose and stood gripping the edge of her desk with tense hands. Before bedtime last night the gang had decided which lessons on the curriculum of Oaklands might in a new age be considered essential and which not. George I and his contemporaries quite definitely came in the second category.

"Miss Radford," said Joan politely but firmly, "do you really think George I and his ministers are of such great importance?"

Miss Radford's cheeks turned purple. She spluttered. Mona said afterwards she could see the spray, as if it were from a watering-can. Miss Radford had taken her degree in history at Oxford and her finest thesis had been on the Hanoverian period. Miss Radford, visibly exerting immense self-control, stuttered:

"Joan Murray, I shall report you to Miss Sainsbury for insolence. Sit down."

Joan sat down, allowing an audible sigh to escape her to show how misunderstood she was. During the next few minutes she received an encouraging grin from Pamela seated rather farther back in the class than herself, and a screwed-up slip of paper hurled from Susan's desk with "Good work" scrawled briefly on it.

The summons to Miss Sainsbury's room came in the short interval between school and the ringing of the luncheon-bell. Joan smoothed down her hair with her hands, walked primly past the prefect who had brought the message, and started the long journey down the corridor leading to the Head mistress's part of the house.

Miss Sainsbury was sitting at her desk; Miss Radford stood beside her. Joan noticed with satisfaction that Miss Radford's cheeks were rather flushed. Miss Sainsbury had shrewd, deep-set eyes into which, as far as the girls were concerned, all her personality seemed to be concentrated.

"Joan," she said, without preamble, "this is a serious offence which Miss Radford has reported to me—insolence in class. What have you to say about it?"

Joan prepared to embark on her carefully rehearsed speech and found she had forgotten it.

"I didn't mean to be insolent, Miss Sainsbury," she muttered. "It's—it's only that the period of history we're doing doesn't seem to be getting us anywhere, I mean with things as they are to-day." She stopped. She knew just what she wanted to explain, but she couldn't find the words in the deathly stillness which was the normal atmosphere of Miss Sainsbury's room.

For a moment there was silence, then Miss Sainsbury said quietly:

"I suppose it doesn't strike you that a history lesson can mean more than just the learning of a number of historical facts. It may represent a certain lesson in self-discipline, call for the effort of sticking to a job till it is accomplished successfully. Do you follow me?"

Joan had looked up, interest in her eyes.

"Yes, Miss Sainsbury," she said meekly.

"We're fortunate in this school," continued the Head, "in having someone with the knowledge and love of history that Miss Radford has, to take our classes. Possibly you've not thought about this, and the words in which you tried to express your—theories, shall we call them?—to Miss Radford were ill-chosen. I am prepared in this instance to accept that view." She turned to the History mistress. "Miss Radford, I suggest, if you agree, that we give George I and his ministers a rest for the moment. There are very interesting developments pending regarding the question of Dominion Status for India. The Secretary of State for India has made some important statements on the subject in a speech in Parliament yesterday. It is reported in *The Times*. The paper is on the couch over there, Joan. I think Miss Radford will be satisfied if you study the

speech and make a précis of it. Am I right, Miss Radford ? "

" Certainly, Miss Sainsbury."

" Very well then," said Miss Sainsbury crisply and gave Joan the usual nod of dismissal. Joan collected the newspaper and left the room. She returned to her classroom wishing Miss Sainsbury had not abandoned King George and his ministers so readily. She had been determined to stand by the gang's decision that a knowledge of that period in history was unnecessary to modern education, and she had been prepared to flout even Miss Sainsbury, and refuse to do any further work on it. Now, she had to return and tamely explain to the others that she'd been let off. She was faced with no test of character, for the gang had unanimously agreed that modern history, things which affected the Dominions, the Colonies, America, and Russia were important in education and must be given their proper place and attention.

Mona's comment when Joan related what had happened, was : " There aren't any spots on old Sane."

The town was at this time rapidly filling up with the first contingent of summer holiday visitors, so the shopping centre was put out of bounds for the school. This was a precaution usually taken as the end of term approached, to avoid the risk of infectious diseases. The beach in front of the school was thus the principal pleasure-ground of the girls outside the school. The gang spent much time there. In their opinion it offered greater freedom than the gardens and playing fields, spacious as these were. Besides, on the sea-front there was always something to watch. Mostly they watched the boys from Heath School at boatwork, rowing the eight-oar cutters, sailing them, or out in smaller boats. Snubby was usually to be seen in charge of one of the latter, rowed by three or four junior boys. Snubby's voice carried well over the water, and listening to the orders he snapped out and watching the response of his crew, the girls came to the conclusion that, given the chance, they could do just as well.

" There doesn't seem a great deal to it," remarked Joan.

" How I wish we could go out in a boat," envied Mona. " It's so beastly stuffy on land."

" Why shouldn't we take a boat out ? " Susan turned to face the other three. " Why shouldn't we make that a test of courage ? It's time we did something to prove to ourselves that we can face up to things."

The others caught the idea at once.

" It's a wizard thought." Joan slapped the author of it on the back.

" Oh, it would be absolutely super," said Mona, hopping on one leg.

" We'll have to choose our time carefully," said Pamela, the practical. " That boat Snubby's in would be the one for us. I believe I could manage the oars in the bows and Sue, you, and Joan could each take a stroke oar. Mona could steer and cox if she'll not lose her head. Mona, your job from now on will be to listen to what Snubby says and watch what he does."

" She ought to be able to manage," remarked Joan, " the sea's wide enough."

" Of course I can manage," retorted Mona indignantly. " I know the orders already. ' Oars out,' when you're to man your oars. U-um, ' Get ready,' when you're to lean forward, and ' Give way together,' when you're to start rowing."

" O.K."

" When shall we do it ? " Susan stared at Pamela.

" How about to-morrow afternoon ? Being a half-holiday Miss Radford and the rest will most likely be off on their bikes on some excursion. There's a cricket match on for the First, so that disposes of the prefects."

" There's an away tennis match too."

" And the small fry don't matter if they are knocking around."

" It's a heaven-sent chance," said Joan.

" About 3.30 it had better be. Afternoon activities will be in full swing by then, and the mistresses who are going out will have gone. The boys are never down here on Wednesday afternoons, so it should be almost too simple to walk down, push the boat into the water, and go for a row." Pamela's dissertation was interrupted, as a prefect, passing them distantly, shouted :

" Buck up, you kids, you're going to be late for afternoon school." The conference quickly broke up, and the four raced up the road.

On Wednesday there was a moderately strong westerly wind sweeping across the bay. All morning rain fell in gusty squalls. The gang in Lower Fifth were several times reprimanded for inattention. Their eyes wandered constantly to the depressing scene outside the classroom windows. The gang gathered in a corner of the gym at " break."

" It's weak to put a thing off just because of a spot of rain," said Pamela, voicing the thought in all their minds.

Susan nodded. " I vote we go through with it."

" And I."

" And I."

They hung about restlessly near the school entrance from the moment luncheon was over. They were free till tea-time, but with a strong recommendation, since it had now stopped raining, to watch the cricket match for the dual purpose of improving their own erratic game and backing up the school.

" You kids coming along to watch ? " demanded

Sheila Owen, the School Captain, emerging from the house with pads and bat under her arm.

"N-not this afternoon, Sheila. We'd planned to go out," said Joan.

"Slackers," was the Captain's comment as she walked on. Since the beginning of term she'd had her eye on the four as future members of the teams; if only they'd show a bit of enthusiasm, take their cricket seriously, and put in more time practising at the nets. These girls were, in Sheila's opinion, a jolly sight too self-centred.

"Better make a start," said Pam. "Someone may grab us if we hang about much longer."

They slunk out of the grounds and turned left along the road. The Heath School boats were hauled up on the beach a few hundred yards or so away.

They took the path down to the shore. Beyond the boats on a strip of sand they noticed a group of people.

"What a crowd," remarked Susan.

"Holiday-makers," said Joan.

"Come on. Let's run," said Mona, who was a little worked up and secretly anxious to get the expedition safely over.

They ran.

A moment later they were heaving and pushing the selected craft towards the lapping waves. It touched water and floated. Faintly the girls heard a cheer from the group farther along the beach. Somebody being facetious, thought Joan, as, hanging on to the gunwale, she splashed through the waves, her skirt and stockings getting thoroughly wet. Susan was already climbing into the boat. They each knew their place and the duty which was to be theirs, so they took their seats grimly and without speaking.

Mona had a bit of difficulty fitting the tiller to the rudder. She hadn't bargained for this, and first of all tried to put it on upside down. At last:

"Ready, ready to row, get out your oars," she said, forgetting the correct orders in her excitement.

The oars were shipped with only a slight mix-up between Pamela's port oar, and Joan's on the same side.

"Give way together."

They did so, but unevenly, rocking the boat, as Joan, again catching Pamela's oar, sawed her stroke through the air. The wind and tide at once took charge, and swung the boat on an easterly course. The wind also brought to the girls' ears an unmistakable cheer from the crowd on the shore.

THEY WERE HEAVING AND PUSHING THE SELECTED CRAFT.

"They think we're in for a race or something," gasped Susan.

"Take no notice," ordered Pam. "Pull together you two. Joan, you're stroke. Keep with her, Susan. And Mona, for goodness' sake head for the buoy, we don't want to go right across the bay."

"I'm trying to," said Mona. "The wind's blowing us that way." They had agreed to row round the buoy and back again. They pulled for a few minutes in silence. A wave or two slopped into the bottom of the boat and swilled around their feet. They knew nothing of tides and the incoming tide was running strongly and sweeping them along till they were nearly level with the knot of people on the beach, though a short distance off-shore. And now they could hear shouts from the crowd:

"Stick to it."

". . . To . . . your . . . right."

"What do they think we're doing?" panted Susan, labouring at her oar and putting so much more effort into her stroke than Joan was capable of doing, that she was unwittingly helping the tide to drive the boat farther off the buoy.

Then suddenly the oarsmen saw a motor launch bearing down upon them from the rear.

Mona, looking over her shoulder at the approaching craft, lost all sense of steering and sat staring, like a small bird mesmerized by a hawk. In a matter of seconds the launch was passing them.

"All right," someone in her yelled, cupping his hands round his mouth so that his voice carried against the wind. "We'll get him."

"What does he mean? What's happened?" gasped Susan.

Before anyone could offer a suggestion, the wash from the speeding motor launch reached them. This was something the girls had not expected. As the boat rolled in the swell, a wave snatched the oar out of Susan's grasp and she fell backwards off the thwart. This naturally upset Joan sitting beside her. Joan managed to cling to her oar but neither her stroke nor Pam's had any effect on the plunging boat. With Mona completely unable to think which way to put the tiller, the tide took charge of the vessel and spun it round.

"We'd better go back," shouted Pamela, hating to admit failure of the enterprise, but conscious that something was amiss.

"Somebody's drowned, I'm sure they are," gasped Mona, now white in the face. She could see the launch swinging to a halt in front of her, though what the two men hanging over the bows were doing was hidden from her view.

"Look out, Susan, there's your oar," shouted Pamela. The sea in a sudden spurt of kindliness had washed the oar back almost against the side of the boat. Joan and Susan both leaned over to grab it and in doing so nearly capsized their craft.

The tide, with little help from Mona, had turned the boat's head towards the beach and was now helping the oarsmen nicely along in that direction. But the girls had to accept the situation, they were going to land many yards from the spot where they had embarked and beyond the group of people.

"Gosh!" It was Mona who uttered the word, and her voice was a high-pitched squeak. "There's Miss Sainsbury, and Miss Radford, waiting for us on the beach."

The oarsmen turned their heads simultaneously to look.

"Holy Moses!"

"Snakes!"

"That's torn it!"

The boat grounded. To the incredible amazement of the girls Miss Sainsbury, holding up her skirt in one hand, waded in and grasped the gunwale.

"That was a very plucky thing to do," said she in her crisp strong voice. "But how did you think you were going to get the man into the boat?"

The girls were now wading and helping Miss Sainsbury to haul up their boat.

"We didn't think about that," said Joan, breaking the silence. Miss Sainsbury grunted and stared across the water.

"He'll be all right now," said Miss Radford, who was hovering on the dry sand just above the girls. "The men have put him into the launch. Too stupid of these visitors to swim so far out when they don't know the currents. It's asking for trouble."

"You must hurry home and change, girls," said Miss Sainsbury. "You're wringing wet. Ask Matron to give you something hot to drink. Perhaps you'll go with them, Miss Radford?"

"Certainly, Miss Sainsbury." Miss Radford wanted to hear more from the girls. She beamed upon them as Miss Sainsbury moved away along the beach towards the group of people, close to whom the launch had now been driven with the half-drowned youth the men had rescued.

"What made you think of going to help?" babbled Miss Radford as she hurried the girls homewards. "Have any of you had any experience in handling boats?"

"I have, a bit, at home," said Joan modestly, and did not add that her experience amounted to pushing a leaking punt with a pole across a small pond, usually to fish out golf balls which her father's guests drove into the lake. The others maintained a discreet and safe silence.

"But you know you never could have lifted the man into the boat. You'd have capsized. Didn't you think of that?"

"No," said the girls, glad to be able to answer truthfully and frankly.

The news of their alleged rescue was all round the school by tea-time. Some of the small fry had seen them come in wet and dishevelled, discovered the reason and, as is the way of small fry, spread the news as effectively as a loud speaker.

Worse was to follow even than the ordeal of all eyes being turned on them as they marched solemnly, one behind the other, to their places at the tea-table. Everyone was seated when suddenly Miss Sainsbury entered the room, walked to her own table, and touched the little hand-bell which commanded silence.

" The school knows the effort made by four girls this afternoon, Pamela, Joan Murray, Susan, and Mona to rescue a foolhardy young man who had swum dangerously far out and was in difficulties. I do not want their action copied, for we do not know, if a motor launch had not been summoned and quickly come to the rescue, how the story might have ended. I imagine the girls' object was to get to the youth and give him what support they could till help arrived. I am sure the school and staff are with me in wanting to congratulate the four girls concerned on their heroic effort, on the initiative they showed, and the promptness with which they acted. I understand one of the four knows something about handling boats. That was indeed fortunate. I am sure you will be relieved to hear that the young man is making a good recovery. He is lucky; and to you girls I say: Well done." She smiled, waved her hand to show she had finished speaking, and the chatter burst forth, loud and excited.

There were tomatoes on the tea-table, but they were not more red than the faces of the four heroines. No one thought it odd that they refused to answer the flood of questions which were showered upon them. Their reticence was put down to modesty.

The return of the tennis team with the news that they had won their match, gave the gang a longed-for opportunity to escape from their crowd of admirers. They fled to one of their favourite haunts, the roof of the pigsties. Trees overhung the roof, and they could crouch there without being seen from the path.

" We have to own up," said Pam, helping Mona up by her jersey.

There was a murmur of assent.

" What are we to say ? " muttered Joan.

" It'll have to be to Miss Sainsbury, I suppose," said Susan heavily.

" Do you think we'll be expelled ? " asked Mona, her blue eyes round as beads.

" Can't be helped if we are," Joan answered.

" We'd better go in a bunch to Sane's room now, before we think too much about it," said Pam.

The others nodded.

They climbed down from their perch, looked ruefully at their muddied hands and marched off, keeping very close together.

" You do the talking, Pam," whispered Joan as they reached the passage leading to the Head's room.

Pam's lips closed in a grim tight line.

Miss Sainsbury looked a trifle astonished to see her four heroines with set faces and, in Mona's case at least, scared eyes.

" What is it ? " she asked.

Pamela plunged into her story.

" Please, Miss Sainsbury, we've come to tell you we didn't do anything brave this afternoon. It was all a horrible mistake. I mean, we didn't set out to rescue that man. We didn't know anybody needed rescuing. We went out in the boat because—because——" The awesome silence overcame Pamela, and she stopped to take a deep breath.

Joan tried to help her: " We were giving ourselves a test in—in courage," she explained in a small voice, and added lamely, " Heath School boys do it."

" Courage," said Miss Sainsbury. " Where does courage come in, in stealing a boat which does not belong to you and breaking one of the strictest rules of the school. I refer to the rule that no girl shall go in a boat without permission, and in charge of a responsible adult."

Desperately Susan tried to explain: " It's a test of courage if you remain stoical whatever happens because you do a thing."

Miss Sainsbury tapped the top of her desk with the tips of her fingers.

" What exactly do you mean ? " she demanded.

They tried to tell her. Helping each other out they explained their desire to train their characters —like the Heath School boys did—and not to finish their education equipped with book knowledge only.

Miss Sainsbury heard them out. She sighed heavily at their distorted views on education.

" Of course," she said finally, " the only thing to be said in your favour is that you had the courage to come and own up and not accept praise which you in no way deserved. Why do you think we have organized games; cricket, for instance ? "

" To keep us fit," volunteered Pamela.

" More than that. Why, Joan, do you think you're encouraged to play cricket ? "

Joan couldn't think of any reason for a minute or more. At last she blurted out: " To teach us to be sporting."

" Yes. And to teach you co-operation, to pull together; to teach you courage in facing up to fast bowling and strenuous fielding; alertness, fielding teaches you that too; all the virtues you see, which you quite rightly wish to be yours. Sheila Owen tells me that she hoped you people would reach team standard this term, but you've disappointed her.

" WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU MEAN ? "

You've behaved abominably this afternoon, worse than I ever imagined would be possible for an Oaklands girl. You realize that, I assume; but do you truly and honestly regret it ? "

An urgent nodding of heads assured her that they did.

" Very well then, I will give you just one more chance to make good—the last, remember. I shall hand you over to Sheila and tell her to occupy every moment of your spare time with special coaching and really hard training for the rest of the term; runs in first break are one method of training. You won't get into the cricket teams this season; you've left it too late, but the same virtues which cricket teaches are needed by members of a hockey team. I don't say you'll achieve places in the hockey teams either, but you might do worse than make that your aim. Well, what about it ? "

" Oh yes, Miss Sainsbury. Oh, thank you, Miss Sainsbury."

" We never thought of games like that," said Susan, immeasurable relief in her voice.

" Hum," said Miss Sainsbury briefly, and dismissed them.

HOW TO MAKE CHALK PICTURES

Materials needed :

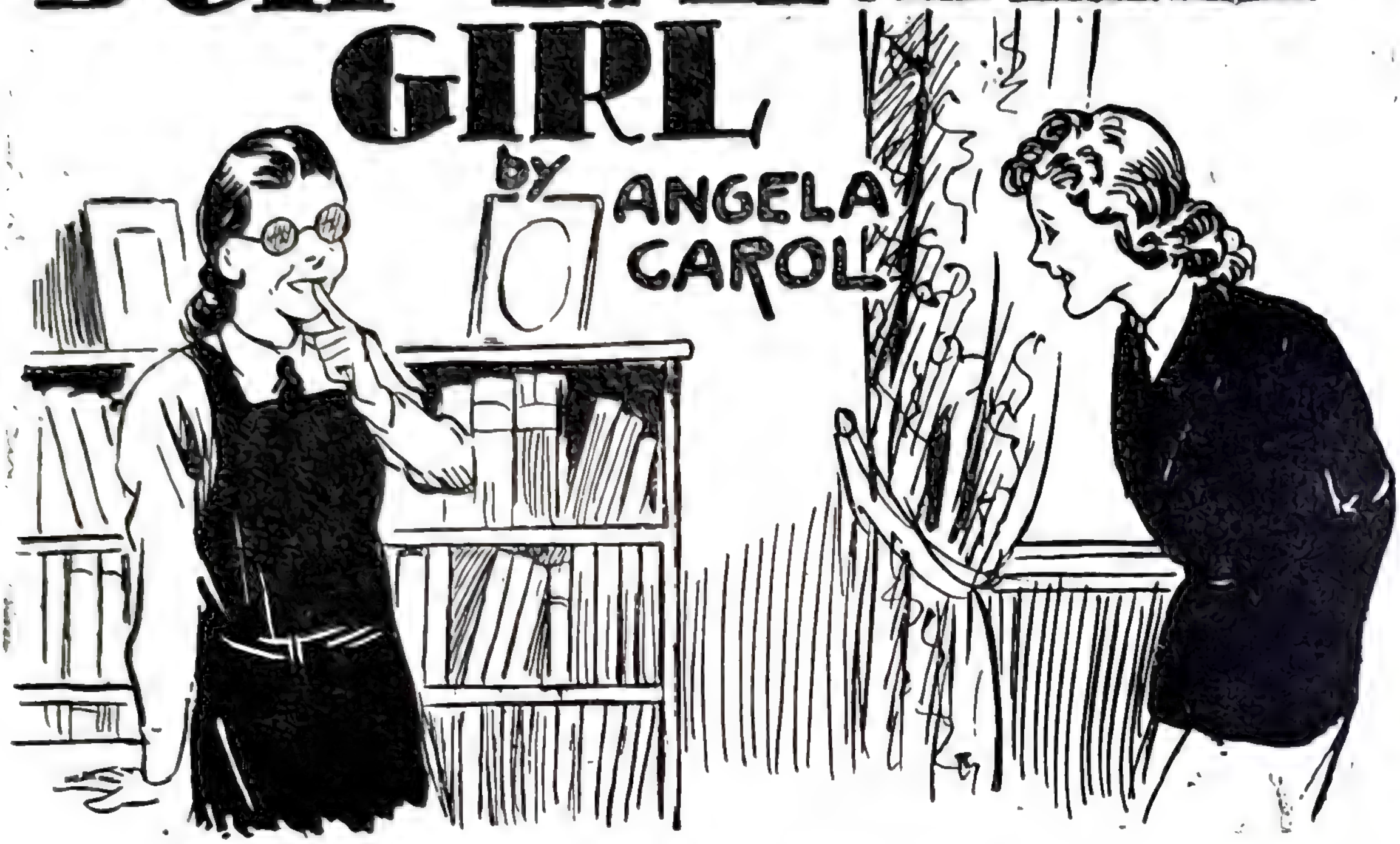
Pictures cut from magazines or newspapers—glue—chalk of different colours.

Choose a large picture—a country scene would be fine for the purpose—and cut it out. Grate chalk with a nutmeg grater or rub it on a piece of sandpaper to make a fine dust. Paper dishes or cups will hold the different colours. Place picture on a newspaper to prevent chalk getting on the table.

Suppose we take a picture of a horse in a meadow in which there is a tree. Brown chalk will do for both the horse and the trunk of the tree. Place a thin coat of glue on those two objects, then shake chalk over it, until the glue is covered entirely. Allow it to settle for a moment, then lift picture and shake it gently, so that the surplus chalk falls on paper. Next green chalk for grass—tree and leaves done in the same way. Blue chalk for sky—white for clouds.

K. LAVERTY.

SCHOLARSHIP GIRL



FREDA GAVE HER A SMILE OF APPROVAL.

IN the ordinary way it would have been a very difficult matter to stir up any extra excitement amongst the girls of St. Merrian's on breaking-up day. For the very simple reason that the very fact of breaking up for the holidays, *plus* the anticipation of Christmas, was productive of about as much excitement as even those very high-spirited young ladies could manage to exhibit. But on this particular occasion the apparently impossible was achieved—and by no less a person than Miss Smollett, the Head, herself.

For this august personage, at the last morning assembly of the term, made a little speech which set the whole place buzzing like a hive of mad bees that has been trodden on by an elephant. What it amounted to, in brief, was that (largely quoting her own words) the opening of the new term would be a milestone in the history of St. Merrian's. For the first time since the foundation of the College, nearly a century previously, they would receive amongst them a scholarship pupil. It seemed that a certain deceased millionaire, whose two daughters had been educated there, had left in his will a sum of money to provide a scholarship fund, open to the pupils of every other girls' school in the country, so that each year one girl should receive three years' free education at the College, by way of "finishing-off." The first of these scholarships had just been competed for, and won, and the winner would join them at the beginning of the new term. Beyond the fact that this lucky young person's name was Edna Ryall, Miss Smollett knew nothing about her—except, of course, that she was obviously both clever and studious, but she sincerely hoped that, for the honour of the College, the girls would, without exception, do their best to accord the new pupil a warm and hearty welcome, and make her feel really at home amongst them.

Miss Smollett had expressed this last hope with a certain element of doubt in her tone, and that this doubt was more than justified was proved by the comments of most of her hearers when, after the assembly had been dismissed (there were, of course, no classes that morning), the girls gathered into groups and excitedly discussed this latest innovation.

"Upon my word, you know"—the speaker was Gladys Cholmondeley, acknowledged leader of the most snobby clique in the school—"this is just about the cast-iron limit! Goodness knows, it's bad enough to have girls here whose people are in *trade*"—she said the last word as though it were something that had a bad smell to it—"but when it comes to

our having to associate with some board-school brat from the slums—well, it really is a trifle *too* thick! What . . . ?"

Freda Fernleigh, the Captain of the School, who was not one of Gladys' clique, said shortly:

"In the first place, my dear Gladys, there are no longer such things as board-schools; in the second, there is no reason for presuming that the new girl comes from the slums; and in the third, there is no earthly need for you to associate with her. The school is quite big enough to hold the two of you without your sitting in each other's laps, you know!"

"Oh, well," Gladys retorted impatiently, "you know what I mean by board-schools—these low County Council places, and she must be a poverty-stricken creature, or she wouldn't have to take a scholarship. As for actually *associating* with her *personally*, of course I shouldn't dream of doing such a thing. But the very fact of having such a—*ah*—*person* in the school at all is a humiliation and an insult to any girl of decent breeding!"

"Never mind, old thing," put in Stella Armstrong, Freda's chum and study-mate, "you'll survive it, if you keep a stiff upper-lip and all that sort of thing. After all, you know, blood will tell! By the way, I suppose you'd never think of going in for a scholarship yourself, would you?"

"I certainly would *not*!" exclaimed Gladys indignantly.

"Very wise of you—seeing that you've never been farther than third from the bottom of your class yet, my dear!" smiled Stella.

This raised a laugh, and Gladys, a notorious dunce, snorted indignantly.

"All the same," commented Pam Waghorn, the prize practical joker of the school, "I *do* think it's a bit thick. And old Smolly asks us to give her a warm welcome, does she? Well, we will—so warm that I doubt if she'll last more than one term, if that!"

This last evoked a chorus of approval from the crowd, who, on the whole, were more or less in sympathy with Gladys. There were cries of: "That's the stuff, Pam—*we'll* show her!" "We'll warm her up, all right!" and so on. Freda gave them all a disapproving look.

"If I were you," she advised coldly, "I'd wait and see what she's like, first. You never know, you know!"

"What, a scholarship girl?" exclaimed Minnie Trent, one of Gladys' chums and admirers. "My dear Freda, at the best she's bound to be pretty low, isn't she?"

"Why?" demanded Freda. "Because she has brains enough to win a scholarship?"

Stella laughed:

"Judging by the scholastic record of these blue-blooded aristocrats of ours," she remarked bitingly, "they naturally *would* be a bit suspicious of anyone with anything behind their eyebrows! We must try to forgive them for that!" With which Parthian shot she linked her arm in Freda's, and the two strolled off to complete their packing.

But, with the exception of one or two who, like Freda, were prepared to wait and see, and to give the scholarship girl a chance, the general concensus of opinion was that it was a bad let-down for the school, and that the newcomer would have to be dealt with accordingly—which, as anyone who knew the spirit of the girls of St. Merrian's would realize, did not offer a very pleasant prospect for her!

There was, however, one exception—one girl who stood aloof, and who took no part in the heated discussion. Pat Merrion listened to it all, however, and sometimes she looked a trifle grave and troubled, and sometimes she smiled a queer, secret little smile. In the end, she took an early opportunity of having a word with the Matron.

"It's about this new scholarship girl," she explained. "It looks to me as though she's in for a pretty rough time. Julia's leaving this term, so I think it would be a good idea if you put the new girl into my study—and also fixed her up in the next bed to me in the dormy, Matron!"

The Matron gave her a quick glance.

"That's very decent and sporting of you, Pat—I'll see what can be done," she agreed. Pat thanked her and walked away, smiling and looking more thoughtful than ever.

. . . . . .

Most of the St. Merrian's girls who lived in London caught the 12.30 train down from Victoria, on which two coaches were specially reserved for their accommodation. But on the day of return from the Christmas holidays, at least two of them did not travel by that, but by a later train. One of these girls was Pat Merrion, and the other Edna Ryall.

They met by appointment at the bookstall, a short time before the train was due to start, and they greeted each other not as old or intimate friends, but as comparative strangers.

"I'm glad you kept the appointment," Pat said. "Because, you see, it's rather important. For you, I mean."

The other girl raised her eyebrows. She was a good-looking, rather than a pretty girl, with a curious facility for rapidly changing her expressions, in a way that seemed at the same time to alter her face completely.

"So I gathered," she responded, "from your rather mysterious letter. Of course, I haven't the faintest notion what it's all about, but I suspect you're trying to do me a good turn—which is

very good of you, as we hardly know each other. Still, as we're going to be school-fellows . . . ! "

" That's just the point ! " said Pat, a little grimly. " But I'll tell you all about it in the train. Let's go along and see if we can get a compartment to ourselves, shall we ? "

" Oh, I'll fix *that* all right ! " smiled Edna, with perfect confidence. Nor was it misplaced. A word with—and a smile at—the guard did the trick, and when he had locked them in, she gave him a tip which might have made some of the snobs of St. Merrian's open their eyes had they seen the size of it—seeing that she was " the scholarship girl " !

As soon as the train started, Pat told Edna about Miss Smollett's speech on breaking-up day, and the sensation it had caused, with especial reference to the reactions of Gladys and Co. Edna listened attentively, and when the other had finished, she commented :

" Seems rather a snooty place, this school of yours, doesn't it ? "

" Oh no, it isn't—*really* ! " Pat answered, eager to defend the good name of St. Merrian's. " Only —well, there *is* a nasty, snobby clique there, and there are rather a lot of them. I'm afraid they're out to give you an unpleasant time, and that's a fact. However, I've done my best—I've fixed with Matron that you share my study, and that you have the next bed to mine in the dormy——"

" I say, that's no end decent of you ! " Edna interrupted gratefully. Pat flushed.

" Oh, that's all right," she rejoined hastily. " I mean, though we ourselves have hardly met, seeing that our maters are such pals I could hardly do less, could I ? But, of course, you can quite easily squash the whole thing by just letting out who you really are . . . ! "

Edna shook her head very decidedly.

" Not on your life, girl ! " she grinned. " I'll give those snobs a run for their money all right, don't you worry." An impish light had come into her blue eyes. " It'll be useful too—after a little while I shall know just who my real friends are ! That's the trouble I've had at my other schools—all the girls knew who I was, and then, of course——" She shrugged expressively.

Pat grinned appreciatively.

" Oh, I'm all for giving the snobocrats a lesson," she agreed. " As a matter of fact, that's why I didn't say anything at the time, or, of course, I could have busted the whole show right away."

" Well, I'm very glad you didn't, my child. Now, listen . . . ! "

For the next half-hour or so the two heads were very close together, and the discussion took a low and conspiratorial tone. Once or twice Pat laughed delightedly, and Edna permitted herself to indulge in a broad grin. Then the former, glancing out of the window, gave warning that they were approaching the station for St. Merrian's, and Edna said quickly :

" Better make a change or two in the old appearance, eh ? Luckily I've a few props with me . . . ! "

From her handbag she took a comb and a piece of ribbon, She dragged the soft, fair hair back remorselessly from her high forehead, and tied it with the ribbon. Then she produced a pair of large, tortoiseshell-rimmed glasses, and adjusted them on her nose. Finally she turned to her companion, and asked complacently :

" How's that ? " She had changed her expression completely, and in some way best known to herself had metamorphosed her face from that of a refined and rather aristocratic girl to that of a typical cockney of the lower type.

Pat chortled.

" Oh, it's *lovely*. I don't know how on earth you do it, you know ! "

" Oh, it's a gift ! " grinned the other. " *And* an inheritance, I suppose ! "

" There's just one snag, though," Pat said thoughtfully. " You'll have to interview Miss Smollett first, you know—all new girls do. And it won't do to put it across *her*, or you *will* be in the soup ! "

" Don't worry ! " Edna grinned. " It's quite easy. I shall interview our esteemed Head looking like *this* . . . ! " Her expression changed again, and now she looked quite refined, but studious. Pat nodded.

" You're a wonder ! " she approved. " But there's one other thing. I'll bet by now old Smolly's found out just who you are, and she'll be sure to want to spill the beans at assembly to-morrow ! "

" I'll ask her not to : tell her I don't want to be made a fuss of, but want to start level with the rest of the school. How's that ? "

" Good ! " said Pat. " She'll fall for that, all right ! "

. . . . . .

At the school excitement was running high again in certain quarters. Gladys and Co. had already searched for the scholarship girl, and had discovered that she had not arrived by the usual train.

" No doubt," Gladys drawled, " she's feeling nervous at meeting us all, as well she might. But she'll have to come, sooner or later ! "

" And *then* . . . " grinned Pam Waghorn, rubbing her hands together. " We'll show her a thing or two, eh ? "

" Oh, rather . . . ! "

Another member of the clique came hurrying to join the bunch. She had news.

" I say, I've just been in Matron's room. It seems

this scholarship kid is to share Pat Merrion's den ! "

" Well, that's a good thing from *our* point of view," commented Minnie. " It's a bit rough on poor Pat, though ! "

" But Matron says Pat *asked* to have her ! "

" Did she, though ? " exclaimed Minnie. " Then she must have a queer taste in study-mates, that's all ! "

" For my part," said Gladys, " I shall cut Pat Merrion dead in future." Which, as Pat normally avoided the snobby crowd like the plague, was hardly likely to worry her much, but no one mentioned that.

Then came a Junior, with more news. The scholarship girl had arrived—with Pat Merrion. She was even now closeted with Miss Smollett.

With one accord the group moved to the Senior Common Room, and took up a strategic position by the door—with the exception of Pam Waghorn, who went off on some mysterious errand (in the direction of the studies) and joined them later. Pat Merrion was there already, talking to Freda and Stella Armstrong, and there was a goodly crowd of other girls present—all being curious about the new arrival.

After a short period of tense waiting, the door opened and Miss Smollett entered, followed by a rather nervous-looking girl, who had her hair screwed back and wore huge, tortoiseshell-rimmed glasses.

" This," Miss Smollett made the usual formal announcement, " is your new schoolfellow, Edna Ryall. I hope you will all make her welcome."

" *I'll* say we will ! " muttered Pam, who had returned from her errand. But she was careful to say it in a tone too low for Miss Smollett to hear. The Head retired, closing the door and leaving the new girl standing just inside it, looking very nervous and uncomfortable. Minnie decided that this would be easy, and opened the ball.

" So—you're the scholarship kid, are you ? "

The new girl shifted uncomfortably from one foot to another. Somehow, one of her stockings had started to come down, and was all wrinkled. Then she sniffed, and wiped her nose on the back of her hand. Finally she answered, in a weak, nervous voice, with an atrocious cockney accent and a strong trace of adenoids ;

" Yus—that's right ! "

Gladys gasped : " Good Heavens ! " and looked as though she were about to faint. Pat Merrion

" SO YOU'RE THE NEW SCHOLARSHIP GIRL ? "

became very interested in one of her own shoelaces. Minnie spoke sharply:

"Call me 'Miss' when you speak to me! You'll have to keep your place here, you know!"

"Yus, Miss!" answered the new girl meekly.

"Where do you live, when you're at home?"

"Befnal Green, Miss!"

"And what does your pater—your *father*—do?"

"Well, Miss, sometimes 'e sells veg'tables, an' sometimes 'e plays an orgin . . .!"

Gladys gasped: "An *organ-grinder*! This is *too* much!" and Pat Merrion was seized with a nasty fit of coughing.

"And your mother?"

"Ow, sometimes Mum does a bit o' singin'—jest to 'elp, like!"

"Do you think you're going to like being at St. Merrian's?"

"Wot—wiv all you torfs? Not 'arf!"

"You're forgetting to call me 'Miss,' my girl . . .!" Minnie's voice was sharp. But Freda suddenly came forward.

"That's enough of that!" she said curtly. Then, to Edna, "You don't have to call anyone 'Miss' here—except the mistresses. We're all on a social level here—at anyrate during term-time!" Minnie Trent flushed, while Gladys sniffed, and said haughtily:

"You're speaking for yourself, I presume, Freda?"

Freda gave her a hard look.

"I am speaking for the school—of which I happen to be Captain. You'd better remember it, Gladys!" She turned to Pat: "By the way, perhaps you two would care to come to tea with Stella and I? If so, we shall be pleased."

"Thanks, Freda—we'll be there!" answered Pat, with a triumphant grin at Gladys and Co. It was a considerable honour to be invited to tea with the Captain—and it was a decided snub for the snobs!

Freda and Stella went out, and immediately after Pat said:

"Well, Edna, let's go and have a look at our den, shall we?"

"Not 'arf!" was the answer. "Kerm on, mate . . .!"

Pam nudged Gladys and Minnie.

"We'll go too," she said. "There may be some fun . . .!"

She spoke in a low voice, but not quite low enough. Edna had singularly sharp ears. The two girls made their way to the studies, and as they came to the long corridor, Edna glanced back. Pam, Gladys, Minnie, and several others were strolling, with apparent carelessness, after them.

"Which is our study?" Edna asked, in a low tone.

"That one, just ahead. Number Eleven!" was the answer.

"Ah! The only one with the door a trifle ajar, I notice. Don't go in for a minute!" As they came opposite to the door, Edna stopped to adjust her wrinkled stocking. Apparently she had difficulty with it, for it took her some time. The others, following, slowed down, but could not absolutely stop. As they drew level they had to pass between the scholarship girl and the door, and in that moment Edna suddenly straightened and gave Pam Waghorn a violent push. It sent her staggering against the door, which opened—and immediately there descended upon the unlucky Pam a mass of soot, while the bag that had held it hung, inverted, from the lintel of the doorway.

"*Ouch . . .!*" gasped Pam. "*Glug—glig—gurrgh . . .!*" That was all she could say for the moment, for her eyes, ears, and mouth were full of soot. Her hair and face were also covered with the evil-smelling stuff, to say nothing of her clothes. To make it worse, even her own cronies roared with laughter at the ridiculous sight she made.

"I thought as much!" said Edna quietly. Then, more loudly, "You gotter get up early in the mornin' to play them tricks on a cockney, mate! There ain't no flies on *us*, yer know!" Pat added:

"While you're about it, you'd better clean up that mess before any of the mistresses spot it, or you'll get into more trouble!" The two walked into the study, where the soot had not penetrated, and slammed the door, leaving Pam outside, looking like a human zebra, and vowing revenge in soot-choked tones.

Later on, at tea, Freda was at pains to be extra nice to Edna. In the most tactful manner possible she gave her one or two hints about her speech, which the latter accepted gravely—occasionally calling her hostess "Miss," as though by accident, or habit. Pat was moved between laughter and anxiety—it wasn't really safe to "spoof" the Captain of the School like that.

There was no prep on the first night of the new term, and the girls mostly assembled in the Common Room to discuss their holidays, and so on. When, after most of the others were assembled, Pam and Edna entered, another "incident" took place.

Minnie Trent took occasion to walk up to Edna, and after giving her a scornful look up and down said haughtily:

"Look here, my girl, you may have come to St. Merrian's by a scholarship, but now you're here let me warn you that we shall expect you to keep your place! What I mean is that you're just a common slum kid, and this is a school for young ladies . . .!"

"Go hon!" exclaimed Edna, in apparent sur-

. . . . THERE DESCENDED UPON THE UNLUCKY PAM A MASS OF SOOT.

prise. " Is it ? Where are they, then ? " And she looked around the room as though seeking them.

There was a laugh from several of the less snobby girls at this quick retort, and Minnie suddenly lost her temper.

" Take that, you cheeky little beast ! " she hissed, and smacked Edna smartly on the cheek.

The effect was remarkable. Edna flushed, then went very white. In a flash her own hand shot out in a slap that sent Minnie staggering. But, not content with that, Edna followed her up, gripped her by the wrist, and twisted her arm behind her back.

" You'll apologize for that, you insolent little beast ! " she exclaimed, and, in her justifiable anger, she forgot all about her cockney accent. The tone was as refined and cultured as that of any girl present !

" I won't apologize ! " Minnie hooted. " Rescue, some of you . . . ! "

Two or three of the clique started to move forward, but so did Freda and Stella, and the former said grimly :

" No interference, or you'll have to deal with *us* ; Minnie asked for all that's coming to her ! "

" You'll apologize all right, my beauty ! " said Edna, between her clenched teeth. " *And* on your knees. Like this . . . ! " She gave the unfortunate Minnie's arm a twist, and the latter, with a squeal of pain, went down on her knees. She had no choice ! " Now—apologize ! " Edna ordered, and twisted the arm just a fraction more.

" Oh, all right ! " Minnie squeaked. " I'll apologize—only don't do that any more—it hurts ! I'm sorry—there . . . ! "

" That's all right then ! " said Edna quietly, as she released her. " But you'll be a lot more sorry if you try that sort of thing any more, and I advise you not to forget it ! "

But now another girl stepped out of the little crowd round Gladys. Ethel Spurr was a big, hefty girl, and she was the finest gymnast and general athlete at St. Merrian's. She stood over Edna, half a head taller.

" You can't get away with that here, you know ! " she said grimly. " We can't stand for that sort of thing from an organ-grinder's kid ! "

" Can't you ? " was the quiet retort. " Well, what do you propose to do about it then ? "

" This . . . ! " The big girl's arm swung, and if the blow had gone home it would have knocked Edna flying. But it didn't get home !

Edna ducked quickly. Then she put out a hand and appeared just to take hold of Ethel Spurr's tie. Next moment the big girl was flat on her back —and the bump was considerable, She roared like a young bull.

"Why, you rotten beast . . . !" On her feet again in a flash, she made a rush at Edna, who seemed to do something with one hand and one foot —and once more Ethel was on her back. This time the bump was even harder.

"I shouldn't try it again, you know!" Edna said quietly. "That's *judo*—an improved form of *ju-jitsu*. And unless you understand it, you can't do very much about it."

"*What* is all this disturbance?" demanded a cold voice from the doorway. The silence of paralysis fell on the room, as its occupants stared, with glassy eyes, at the spare, angular form of Miss Tully, the Senior Assistant Mistress. Receiving no answer, but taking in the scene before her—Ethel still lying prone on the floor, and Edna standing over her, Miss Tully went on: "Apparently a free-fight—and you call yourselves young *ladies*! *Hooligans* I should say would be a better word. *Who* is responsible for this?"

There was a long and painful silence. Ethel sat up, but only to stare, open-mouthed, looking rather like a sick codfish. Then Miss Tully announced:

"I shall punish you *all*, unless someone confesses!"

Another painful silence. Then Edna spoke up:

"I'm afraid it was I who knocked this girl down!" she admitted.

"*You . . . !*" Miss Tully glared at her. "And *you*, I think, are the new girl—the *scholarship girl*! Well, perhaps that accounts for a lot! I shall have to report you to the Head mistress. You will go to her study"—she glanced at the watch on her bony wrist—"in half an hour's time. In the meanwhile, you had better restrain your—er—violent impulses. Remember that you are now in what is supposed to be a school for young ladies, if you please!" She went out, slamming the door behind her.

The Gladys Cholmondeley faction immediately let loose the chortles they had had to repress in the mistress's presence:

"*That'll* teach her!" grinned Minnie delightedly. "By the time Smolly's done with her perhaps she'll realize she isn't in the slums any longer!"

"And also, I imagine," interposed Freda loudly, "that there are worse places than those same slums. It was *your* faults, yet not one of you had the decency to say a word. You let her take the blame!" She turned suddenly on Ethel, who had risen to her feet: "What are *you* going to do about it?" she demanded.

The big girl went very red.

"I'm sorry, Freda! But I was so shaken up I couldn't speak, just at the moment!" She turned to Edna. "You may be an organ-grinder's kid, or you may not. But you're a sport, anyway! And I'm coming with you to Miss Smollett's den!" She hesitated for a moment, then held out her hand. Edna took it.

"That's very decent of you!" she acknowledged quietly.

Freda nodded approval, then, her face grim, but a twinkle in her eye, she tackled Edna:

"By the way, kid, what's happened to that precious cockney accent of yours?"

For the first time since she had been at the school Edna went very red, and looked uncomfortable.

"I'm sorry!" she said humbly. "I owe you and Stella an apology, because you've been awfully decent to me. But, you see, I happened to know that these—*ahem*—young *ladies* expected the scholarship girl to be a terrible outsider, so I thought it would be a pity to disappoint them! When you asked us to tea, I could hardly give the show away, could I? Though, of course, I couldn't have kept it up after to-day, as Miss Smollett knows all about me. But I *did* want to pull some of these aristocratic legs as long as possible. However, I do most sincerely apologize—to *you*."

Ethel Spurr burst into a great roar of laughter.

"Oh, my only aunt's pink hat! What a spoof!" Gladys and Co. looked red and furious. Freda laughed as well, and said:

"All right, kid—I'll forgive you. But—what about the organ-grinding father, eh?"

"Oh, that," replied Edna gravely, "is quite correct. My father *does* play the organ, and he *does* sell vegetables. I'm not ashamed of it!" Freda gave her a smile of approval, and said, "Good kid!" But Gladys sniffed, and said loudly:

"Of course, they *do* educate the lower classes nowadays far above their station. But it's pretty rough on decent schools like this. I shall ask my parents to take me away from here at the end of the term."

"That'll be fine!" commented Pat, and commenced to hum: "We can do without you very well . . . !"

"Well," said Edna, "that part of the little comedy being over, we can do without the make-up, I think!" She took off her big glasses, and, stepping over to the mirror, undid her hair-ribbon. A touch or so with a comb, and she turned to face the room once more. There was a gasp of astonishment, as they realized the extraordinary change in her appearance—from the rather stupid, common-looking girl to the aristocratic and decidedly attractive one.

"Great pip!" Freda gasped. "How on earth do you do it?"

"Oh, it's a gift!" Edna smiled. Gladys sniffed, and said loudly:

"Fine feathers don't make fine birds, you know!"

"So we've noticed," Pat grinned. "Especially since you've been here!" This fetched a laugh as Gladys was notoriously given to over-dressing whenever she had the chance.

Then Edna and Ethel went off on the rather grim business of interviewing the Head. But it was not so bad after all.

Miss Smollett's eyebrows went up as Edna came into her study.

"You have—er—rather changed your appearance, have you not?" she asked, rather ominously. Edna nodded.

"I must apologize for that, Miss Smollett," she answered frankly. "I should like to make it clear that I had no intention of—of spoofing you, or any of the other mistresses. It was just that I had heard that some of the girls here expected me to be a certain type of girl, and I—well, I'm afraid I set out to take a rise out of them!"

"I trust you succeeded!" said Miss Smollett, with a faint smile. "I do not like—ah—snobbishness! I imagine all this caused the regrettable affair which has just been reported to me?"

Ethel spoke up boldly for the first time:

"If *I* might explain that, Miss Smollett . . .?" Then, receiving the required permission, she did so, quite frankly and without sparing herself.

When she had finished the Head considered the matter gravely for a few moments, and then said:

"Yes, I quite understand—and, in view of your frankness, Ethel, I shall not punish either of you. I must, however, ask you both to give your word that you will not indulge in any further acts of violence during the term, if you please. Also you may both consider yourselves severely reprimanded. Now, you may go—I am busy . . .!" They went, feeling they had been let off very lightly.

The term went on. Edna had a good deal to put up with—such as cheeky Juniors (doubtless encouraged by Gladys and Co.) calling out after her, "Fine large cabbage!" or pretending to grind an organ as she passed them. Also there was a very large faction in the school who refused to associate with her.

But her sporting action on that first evening had had its effect, and when it was found that she excelled, not only in the classroom, but also at most of the games and sports popular at St. Merrian's, most of these gave way, and it was not long before she was accepted as an equal by the best element in the school. It was only Gladys and the snobby faction who continued to ignore her.

Then at the end of the term came the Great Showdown!

One morning Miss Smollett once again set the whole school agog with excitement, when she announced that at their annual prize-giving (which always took place at the end of the Easter term) the prizes would be given away by no less a person than Ronald Reville, the world-famous stage and film star, about whom almost every girl in the school (in common with most girls all over the civilized world) was crazy. Actually to take a prize from the hands of their hero! To have him say a few words to them as he gave it! Why, Minnie Trent had been the most popular girl in the school for a whole term because she had managed to get his autograph! Once again, as when they had heard about the advent of the scholarship girl, the whole of St. Merrian's hummed like an overturned beehive.

Sensation followed sensation! For the next piece of news was that a deputation of six girls was to be chosen to meet the Great Man at the school gates, and to make a brief speech of welcome. (This had, of course, been arranged by his publicity-agent—but who cared about that?) There would be press-photographers there, too! When it was learned that the selection of this deputation was to be in the hands of Freda Fernleigh and Stella Armstrong, they immediately became the most popular girls the school had ever known—until after their decision.

Gladys was quite confident about it all. As she said to Minnie:

"They're almost bound to choose us! Not only because of *who* we are, but also because we can afford to dress the part—and that will be all to the credit of the school! After all, the photos will be in all the papers!" For once, Gladys was right—the lucky six were all chosen from her particular clique, and included Gladys and Minnie themselves. But what the former did *not* know was of a consultation that had taken place previously between Freda and the Head, at the conclusion of which Miss Smollett had nodded, and said:

"Yes, I think that's quite a good idea, Freda. It will certainly tend to drive the little lesson home to them!"

So, for the three weeks that elapsed between the Head's sensational announcement, and the advent of the Great Day, excitement ran high at St. Merrian's. The lucky six were allowed a day's holiday to go to town and buy their dresses for the occasion—and they all felt that they were lucky indeed!

The Great Day dawned at last—and during the expectant morning (on which classes were but a farce; who could even try to work on such a day?) another queer rumour ran round the school. Edna Ryall, the scholarship girl, was missing! She had gone off in the station-taxi early in the morning, and had not been seen since.

"What it is," said Gladys, with her famous sniff, "is that they're ashamed of the slum-brat, and they've sent her off home a day in advance to get

her out of the way, and a very sensible thing to do too!"

But, anyway, no one had much time to think about the scholarship girl that day—except, perhaps, Freda, Stella, and Pat Merrion, who might at times have been seen to be smiling at some private joke of their own.

When the great moment came it was exciting enough! There were reporters, pressmen with cameras, and even a newsreel outfit with cine-camera and microphone complete. There was also the town band, and quite a huge crowd of people, eager to get a glimpse of the world-famous star.

There was actually a little cheer when the Deputation of Welcome sailed through the gates, in their billowing chiffons, and took up their appointed places, and one or two cameras clicked. Gladys felt that this was the greatest moment of her life (needless to say, she regarded herself as the Leader of the Deputation, even if no one else did!)

At long last, the big, shining Hispano-Suiza appeared, and rolled smoothly to a halt outside the gates. The band played a few bars of "See the Conquering Hero Comes!" and the Deputation, trembling with nervousness and delight, stepped forward. The great Ronald Reville, smiling, debonair, immaculate, stepped out of the car, his hat in his hand. Cameras clicked—the crowd cheered—the movie-camera hummed. The Deputation made their little speech, and Ronald smiled and bowed. Then he made his speech of reply, and said, in those soft, deep, caressing tones so well known to all cine-goers:

"I thank you all very much for your welcome. But I would like you to know how much pleasure it gives me to be among you to-day, and for one particular reason. Although I understand none of you have been aware of the fact, my little daughter has been one of your fellow-pupils for a whole term now, and she has told me how good you have all been to her. You see . . .!" Here he turned to the car and made a gesture, and from its cushioned depths there emerged, wearing her ordinary school uniform of blouse and gym-slip, and the school-hat with the badge on it—Edna Ryall, the "Scholarship Girl"—and in front of them all he put his arm round her and kissed her:

Red-faced, goggle-eyed, and with mouths agape, the Deputation stared at the smiling pair—between whom the resemblance was now so obvious—and wished that the ground would open and swallow them. More especially as at that moment the cameras clicked again, and the movie-camera hummed once more—putting for ever on record the astounded and idiotic expression on the faces of the élite of St. Merrian's, as they received the biggest shock of their young lives. Behind them the whole of the school, led by Freda, Stella, and Pat, first roared with laughter, and then cheered vigorously—though, with the exception of the first three, they were as much surprised as the wretched Deputation was!

The Great Man finished his speech by saying—and looking directly at the Deputation as he said it:

". . . And thank you all very much for giving my daughter such a warm and splendid welcome—almost as warm a one as you have been kind enough to give to me."

"Oh, my hat!" gasped Freda. "Talk about coals of fire!"

"I'll say so!" chortled Pat. "He's rubbing it in, all right—and he doesn't know a thing about it!" For now he was shaking hands with each one of the Deputation in turn!

It was over at last—the car rolling majestically up to the main entrance, where Miss Smollett and the Staff were waiting to welcome the Distinguished Guest, and the band banging and blowing their heads off.

It was the greatest prize-giving St Merrian's had ever seen—with Edna, despite her single term there, carrying off more than her share of prizes. Then the final sensation, when Ronald Reville issued an invitation to the whole of the Deputation to spend a week of their holiday at Midsummer Towers, his magnificent country estate.

"I dare say," he told them, "you will find plenty to amuse you there. I've a good stable, if you like riding, and there's boating, and swimming in the lake. In addition to which I have one of the finest kitchen-gardens in the country, and I sometimes play the grand organ, by way of recreation. I'm mentioning this because I dare say my small daughter has hinted to you that her father sells vegetables and plays the organ—which is perfectly true, but is apt to give rise to misapprehension! I'm sure she'll like to show you her new car, which she acquired as the result of a bet with me that she couldn't win the scholarship for St. Merrian's . . .!"

THE CAT WHICH SWAM THE THAMES

A NUMBER of years ago a Thames shipbuilding firm shifted its works from one side of the river to the other. The works cat and its newly-born kittens were also moved.

One day the watchman in the old yard was astonished to find one of the kittens in the old premises. Next day he discovered a second kitten keeping the first company. After this the man decided to keep watch.

You can imagine his surprise when one day he saw a small head bobbing up and down far out on the river: it was the mother cat carrying in its mouth a third kitten, returning to the old homestead.

A CREDIT TO THE SCHOOL

by

DAVID MORRIS

BELOW HER THE SCHOOL GARDEN, AND THE PLAYING FIELD BEYOND.

"NO, Pamela."

"But, Auntie——"

"Really, Pamela, cannot you take no for an answer? I have already told you that arrangements have been made for you to enter St. Margaret's. It will be better for you to be under someone who is not a relative, and I have no doubt you will do well under Miss Lacy."

"Yes, but——"

"That will do, Pamela. You leave for St. Margaret's the day after to-morrow. You must excuse me now. I am due at the Teachers' Conference. Please close the door as you come out."

Miss Bonner rustled out of the doorway, leaving Pamela Kirkwall alone in the comfortably furnished study. She moved across to the window, and stood looking out with a clouded brow. Below her was the green quadrangle, the school garden, and a distant glimpse of the playing field beyond.

Pam loved Ivywood, although she had not seen it until six weeks ago. She had been sent home from India to complete her education, the arrangements being left in the capable hands of Miss Bonner, who was sister to Pam's mother. Pam had expected to stay at Ivywood, but her aunt thought otherwise. It would be better, Miss Bonner decided, if Pam went to a school of which her aunt was not the Head mistress.

Pam was about to leave the room when the telephone bell rang. She stepped across to the desk and picked up the receiver.

"Hello! Is that Miss Bonner of Ivywood?" came a cool, business-like voice.

"I'm sorry," Pam replied, "but Miss Bonner is not here at the moment. Could I take a message?"

"Thank you. This is Lady Radfield's secretary speaking. Please tell Miss Bonner that her ladyship will not be able to visit Ivywood to-morrow. An unexpected but important engagement will necessitate her staying in London."

"Oh, very good!"

"Thank you. Good-bye."

Pam replaced the receiver and left the study. Lady Radfield had been Captain of Ivywood in her younger days, and her visit had been keenly anticipated. No special preparations or welcome had been planned, but it was expected that her ladyship would address the school in the Lecture Hall.

"I wonder!" Pam murmured suddenly.

She went down, and out into the school garden, where she strolled up and down, thinking hard. Having thought matters out to her satisfaction she

returned to the house, and went up to the Fourth Form studies. She had already made friends in that Form, especially with Madge Hewitt, the Form Captain.

"Hello, Pam!" Madge greeted her. "Had any luck with Miss Bonner?"

"None. I'm for St. Margaret's now."

"It's a shame. She might have let you stay."

"Oh, I don't doubt she thinks it's best for both of us, but I'll never take to another school like I've taken to Ivywood. I've news for you, Madge. Lady Radfield isn't coming to-morrow."

She told of her conversation with Lady Radfield's secretary. "Have you that paper containing Lady Radfield's photograph?" she asked abruptly.

"It's somewhere around. Yes, here it is."

Madge tossed over an illustrated weekly, and Pam turned the pages until she came to Lady Radfield's photograph, which she studied intently.

"I could do it," she murmured.

"Do what?" asked Madge in surprise.

"Listen, Madge. We're the only ones at Ivywood who know that Lady Radfield isn't coming, and I can see a chance for a bit of fun. You've told me there's a Dramatic Society in the school, and I've no doubt I can borrow a few props when no one's looking. I can hire a car from the town garage. Fortunately, Lady Radfield's small, and I'm rather tall for my age."

"Pam, what on earth are you talking about? You don't mean——"

"Why not?" grinned Pam.

"But—but her ladyship is to address the whole school. You can't do that."

"Can't I? I can talk all right. Lady Radfield's been to India, hasn't she? Well, so have I, and I can talk about India."

"But, Pam, it will come out. It's bound to come out."

"I know, but it may not come out who did it. Even if it does, I shall be at St. Margaret's by that time."

Madge stared at her for a moment or two, and then went off into a peal of laughter. Pam laughed too.

"Now," she said, when they had sobered down a little, "if you'll lend me your bike and borrow another, we'll slip down into the town and fix things."

They went down, and as they passed out of the gates they met a tall, well-dressed gentleman coming in. He gave them a nod and a smile. Later that evening, Miss Bonner mentioned to Pam that twin sisters were coming into the Fourth, and Pam at once guessed that the tall gentleman was their father.

At three o'clock on the following afternoon, a car turned in at the gates of Ivywood, and swept up to the main door. Miss Bonner had been watching for it from her study window, and as it turned in at the gates she hurried out to meet it. Within the car was a small but stately lady, and Miss Bonner never dreamed of suspecting that it was her niece.

Pam had done her work well. A little padding here and there had given her a matronly figure, and enabled her to wear a becoming costume and coat. Her hat, when removed, revealed a head of silvery-grey hair, done just like Lady Radfield's. A judicious touching up of her eyebrows, and the skilful use of a make-up pencil had completed the transformation. Dressing-up had always been Pam's favourite game, and she had made full use of this opportunity. A friend of Madge's in the town had lent Pam a room in which the transformation could take place, and to which she could return when the adventure was over.

During her stay at Ivywood Pam had done her lessons in her aunt's house, and under her aunt's supervision. But for the last day or two of her stay lessons had been pushed aside, and Pam was free to do as she liked.

The chauffeur opened the door, and Pam stepped out.

"Welcome to Ivywood, Lady Radfield," Miss Bonner began. "I am so glad you have been able to come along."

"Thank you, my dear Miss Bonner. I have been looking forward to coming. It is such a joy to see the old school again!"

They went along to Miss Bonner's study, where they talked of the school, past and present. Pam felt quite safe on this subject, because she had spent the morning in looking through the school records. She was very careful every time she spoke, and pitched her voice in what she hoped was a pleasant, contralto tone.

"I have not arranged an elaborate programme," Miss Bonner told her, "but I thought you might care to see the classrooms before speaking in the Lecture Hall. After tea we can have a more extensive tour."

"That will be very enjoyable, but I—er—must not stay too long after tea. Perhaps—er—another time, I can arrange a longer stay."

They left the study and went along to the Form rooms, where Lady Radfield was introduced to each teacher in turn. Now that the first moment of nervousness had passed, Pam was enjoying every minute. This was the type of mischief she revelled in, and she felt reasonably safe from discovery now.

"While the classes are assembling in the Lecture Hall," Miss Bonner remarked, as they came away from the Form rooms, "I would like to show you the new gymnasium. It is the gift of one of our Governors, and will, I feel sure, be a valuable asset."

They went back to the main doorway, and as they

A MAN WAS KNEELING BEFORE MISS BONNER'S SAFE.

passed through it Pam had the shock of her life. A luxurious car had stopped at the foot of the steps, and a second but more perfect Lady Radfield was ascending them. She came to a stop at the top of the steps, and stared at her double in amazement. Miss Bonner gasped audibly.

There was an awkward pause.

"What—what—" stuttered Miss Bonner. "Lady Radfield! Then who—what——"

"Who is this person?" demanded Lady Radfield.

"I—I supposed—I certainly supposed——" stammered Miss Bonner. "Stop!" she added, as Pam took a backward step. "You are an impostor; I can see that now. Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"Oh dear!" groaned the hapless Pam. "I—I'm Pamela—your niece."

"Pamela—my niece?" repeated Miss Bonner. "Impossible!"

"It's true!" groaned Pam. "Look!" She took off the wig, revealing her own nut-brown locks underneath, and although it was still not the Pamela she knew, Miss Bonner could no longer doubt. Thunder gathered on her brow.

"Pamela, you—you have dared to impersonate Lady Radfield? Why have you done this?"

Pam told how she had taken the telephone call, and how she had staged the impersonation. As Lady Radfield listened, her stern look melted, and a twinkle came into her eyes.

"It seems then that I am partly responsible for putting temptation in this girl's way. The engagement my secretary spoke of had to be cancelled at the last moment, but it was not until lunch-time to-day that I was certain I could come here. I seem to have arrived at a most unfortunate moment for my double," she added smilingly.

Miss Bonner did not smile. She had already introduced one Lady Radfield to her teachers, and it would be an awkward business, introducing another!

"Pamela!" she said sternly. "You will dismiss this car you have hired, and then get rid of this—this disguise. Then you can wait in my study until I come to you. Lady Radfield, I can only say how very sorry I am Will you please come this way?"

They faded away, and Pam sorrowfully dismissed

her driver. When she had washed and changed, she went along to Miss Bonner's study. By that time, her aunt and Lady Radfield had left already for the Lecture Hall.

Pam sank into an armchair. She had a long wait in front of her, for Miss Bonner was not likely to come to her study again until Lady Radfield had gone. Pam would miss her tea, but that, no doubt, was part of her punishment.

After five minutes Pam was pacing restlessly up and down, for inaction always bored her. She selected a book of poems from Miss Bonner's shelves and went back to the armchair, but poems did not prove very exciting after such an exciting afternoon.

Suddenly, Pam sat bolt upright as a footstep sounded in the passage. It was a soft, stealthy footstep, and it stopped at the door of the study.

Pam looked round quickly. There was a little ornamental screen in one corner of the study, and she darted across to it. Why she did so she could hardly have said, but there was something in that footstep that warned her of danger. Kneeling down behind the screen, she listened breathlessly as the door was softly opened and closed again. There was a faint click as the key turned in the lock.

Pam's heart thumped as soft footsteps came across to the window. For some moments the unknown person stood there, then the footsteps receded again, and there was a faint chink of metal. Pam let another minute elapse, and then peeped round the screen.

A man was kneeling before Miss Bonner's safe, and Pam almost gasped as she saw that it was the tall, well-dressed gentleman, whose daughters were supposed to be coming to the school. Her mind in a whirl, she popped back into cover.

But in a few minutes Pam had grasped the situation. The man's visit of the day before had been only a pretext—a clever ruse to gain information. By it he had learned the way to Miss Bonner's study, of the burglar alarms that were set each night, and of Lady Radfield's visit. It was clear that he feared the burglar alarms, or he would have come at night. It was no coincidence that he had arrived at a time when the whole school was assembled in one place.

Pam was witnessing a daring, but well-planned daylight robbery. The man had come in by a side door or window, and would go out again the same way. There was no one to stop him, unless Pam could do it, and how could she? She could not hope to overcome him by herself.

The safe door was open before Pam thought of a way. Then the screen was hurled aside with a crash as she leapt for the door. The man was on his feet at the first sound, and he sprang after her.

Pam grabbed the key and drew it out. Then she skipped back, dodged round the desk, and leapt for the window. It was partly open, and she banged it wide.

"Help!" she screamed, flinging the key out. "A burglar—in this study!"

A moment later she was wrenched away, but she had done what she set out to do. They were both prisoners, unless the man chose to risk a big drop from the window, and even that choice was denied him, for Pam twined her arms around his legs and hung on tenaciously.

Heavy blows rained down on her head and back, but she clung to him. Lady Radfield's chauffeur was pacing up and down beside the car, and the key must have dropped almost at his feet. If only he came quickly. . . .

Swift footsteps hammered up the passage as the cracksman at last released himself and sent Pam sprawling. A key turned in the lock and the door was flung open. Pam struggled to her knees and saw, as if through a mist, the cracksman go staggering back before a shower of skilful punches. Then she rolled over again as darkness rushed down on her.

. . . . . .

"Pamela, my dear, brave Pamela!"

Pam opened her eyes to find that she was in bed, with Miss Bonner at her side. The school Matron hovered in the background.

"Are you feeling better, Pamela?" asked Miss Bonner, a catch in her voice.

"I—yes—but that man!" exclaimed Pam, as memory flooded back to her.

"At the police station by now," Miss Bonner told her. "But you are not to talk, Pamela. The doctor has told us that you must be kept quiet for a few days, and sleep as much as you can. You will soon be all right again then."

"A few days?" repeated Pam. "But I should go to St. Margaret's to-morrow."

"You are not going. You are, as Lady Radfield says, a credit to the school, and after what has happened I would not think of letting you go elsewhere. You will go into the Fourth, and share Madge Hewitt's study. Now do lie still, dear. I will come in again soon."

Her lips brushed Pam's cheek, and she hurried away.

"Not going?" Pam repeated slowly, as strength came back to her. "Madge Hewitt's study? Golly! It's worth a few bumps on the head!"

THE TRICKS OF TRIX

by Winifred Norling

SHE BURST OUT, "CAN YOU MAKE ME A WEDDING CAKE?"

"HELLO, everybody," cried Trixie Davenport, bursting into the Fourth's Common Room on the first evening of the summer term. "Thought I'd never get to the jolly old place to-day. I missed two connections, lost my ticket, and finally had to find the one and only prehistoric taxi Firswood could produce, because I'd missed the school bus."

"Trust you, Trix, to make a glorious muddle of everything you do," teased Clare Ferguson. "I thought we were going to have a short respite from your harum-scarum tricks, but I suppose that would be too good to be true."

"Oh, to-day was nothing," Trixie retorted airily. "Going home I dropped my report out of the train window—true, that wasn't much loss—and I caught the wrong express at Tilston and ended up at York instead of Cornwall."

"Trix, you didn't!" burst out Natalie Child. "You're just kidding us. Not even *you* would be quite so mad."

"It's gospel truth," declared Trixie. "I'll tell you all about it some time. I had a lovely time at the hotel all by myself. I had to wait while they wired for money for me. I had only threepence-halfpenny, and I shouldn't have had that if the choc machine at Tilston hadn't been out of order. Ah, Patsy, mine, I was wondering where you'd hidden yourself. How art, lambkin?"

"Getting over the effects of the Irish Channel, me darlint," Patsy O'Farrell answered. "The waves were forty feet high at times, or my name's not Hermione Underwood."

"Don't take the Head's name in vain, Patsy," laughed Phoebe Bevington. "The Typewriter might object. I was trying to write my safe-arrival card for Mother, but I suppose I'll not get a chance now you two have arrived on the scene."

"Heard the news, Trix?" burst out Clare. "Bandylegs has left, and we've a new Form mistress."

"Seen her?" asked Trixie with interest.

"Yes, it's Dilly from the Second."

"What infernal cheek!" exploded Trixie. "Fancy giving us a ninny like that! She was too feeble even to keep the babes in order. Heaven help her now! Poor old Bandylegs! Wish she hadn't gone. I was her *bête noire*, but I did respect the angel. The Dilly Dally Duckling is too impossible! I'd rather have the Jelly."

"One can hardly compare Miss Dillon with Miss Chivers," declared Phoebe. "They're poles apart. I'm more sorry for Dilly than for you, Trix."

"I never get any sympathy," sighed Trixie, rolling her eyes and pulling awful faces at Patsy. "But there's one thing about the change: it will mean a record term for me. I returned intending to paint St. Hilary's red, and having Dilly in charge will help a lot. I'll be able to carry out heaps more of the japes I've half-planned, now there's only Dilly to be considered."

"Why have you such a down on poor Dilly, Trix?" asked Patsy. "You'd better not go too far, or I shall be forced to stand up for my countrywoman and desert you."

"Don't break my heart, twin soul," said Trixie, between mock sobs and pulling out yards of imaginary handkerchief. "If *you* desert me I'll be like the house that 'stood alone between two more, and it was whitewashed black.' Patsy, if you don't stop yowling 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep,' I'll rock you till you *long* for the Irish Channel."

"Was the Typewriter wild that you turned up so late?" asked Natalie with interest. "She usually rants terribly if one misses the school bus."

"She said something about hoping it wasn't a something of things to come. Perhaps she was thinking about that book written by a Home Guard."

"Home Guard?" Clare sounded puzzled. "Oh, you ass, you mean H. G. Wells' *Things to Come*."

"Have you girls done all your unpacking?" asked a voice at the door, and turning, Trixie saw the Head Girl, Valerie Dare.

"I haven't, Valerie," she cried. "I've only just arrived. I missed two connections and the school bus. I haven't been able even to get up to my dormy yet. These bullies kept me here answering questions, and now Matron will be cross. I really *must* go, all. See you later."

"I hope, Trixie," began the Head Girl when they were out in the passage, "that you are going to be less troublesome this term than last. It's up to girls like you, who have influence, to help Miss Dillon."

"She'll certainly need all the help she can get," Trixie answered meekly, but there was a mischievous twinkle in her eyes that did not escape Valerie's notice.

"You'll give her a fair chance, Trixie, won't you?" begged the Head Girl. "She'll find the Fourth rather different to manage from the Second."

"She certainly will," agreed Trixie with unusual fervour, and she ran off upstairs, leaving the Head Girl lost in thought.

Miss Dillon was not left long in doubt as to the attitude of her new charges. Not a day passed without Trixie putting into action some well-thought-out jape that interfered with lessons.

"Give her a rest to-day, Trix," implored Patsy one morning some weeks later. "The poor soul needs breathing space sometimes. I think she'd be heaps better if you'd only leave her alone."

"Can't to-day, Patsy mine," sang Trixie. "I've had a box of toffee from home, and that's too good an opportunity to miss. There's enough for everyone in the Form to have a lump to suck in history. She can't send us all out of the room, and yet we'll not be able to answer any questions."

"Sounds a good jape," chuckled Natalie. "I'm game."

"And you, Patsy?"

"Oh, I'll join in, of course, though I'll admit it seems rather kiddish."

"We're dealing with a Second Form mistress," explained Trixie, and most of the Form agreed with her.

When Miss Dillon entered the classroom that morning she was met by sounds of rather noisy sucking. For a moment she stood still, a trifle nonplussed, then she said quietly:

"Will all the girls in the Form who are eating sweets stand up?"

The whole Form rose *en masse*.

"I see. Each girl may sit down directly she has finished eating, but no one is to remove anything from her mouth."

It was the girls who were nonplussed now, for Miss Dillon took no further notice of them but calmly went on marking books. It was more than half an hour before Trixie, the last one left standing, resumed her seat.

"Is everyone quite ready to begin the lesson now?" asked Miss Dillon pleasantly.

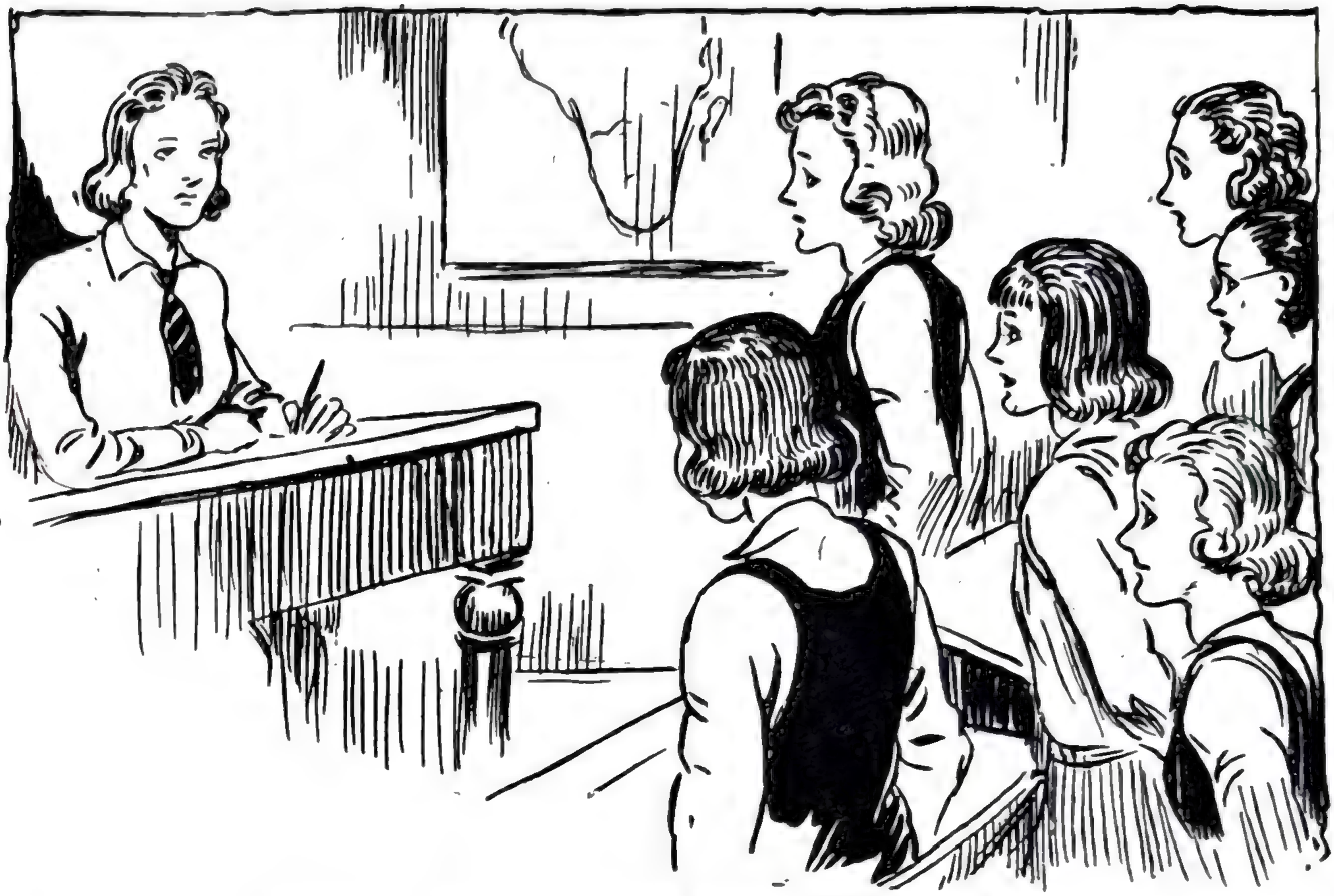
"Yes, Miss Dillon," Trixie answered; "but it's just time for the bell."

"The bell need not worry us," said Miss Dillon smoothly. "Patsy, please take this note to Miss Chivers. She is in the next classroom. It explains why the Fourth are missing dinner to-day."

"Missing dinner?" cried Trixie in astonishment.

"That is what I said, Trixie. You can hardly expect the rest of the school to wait nearly three-quarters of an hour while you have your history lesson. You have all been eating for the whole of this period, so you can't be hungry, and it won't hurt you to go without a meal. Now find your history books quickly, and we will begin."

It was a very disgruntled Form who were finally released from their classroom, and even Trixie had to admit that the mistress had scored. But the admission only roused her to further efforts. Twice there was no ink in the Fourth's inkwells, but Miss Dillon quickly ended this trouble by producing First Form copy books which the Fourth had to copy in pencil. While they were engaged on this baby work, Miss Underwood had come into the room to speak to Miss Dillon, and the Fourth



"WILL ALL THE GIRLS WHO ARE EATING SWEETS STAND UP?"

had not liked the amused smile and uplifted eyebrows with which the Head regarded them.

"Dilly seems to be scoring all along the line," remarked Patsy unwisely. "I'm beginning to quite like her. You can't think of anything, Trix, to which she can't find a good answer."

"I can," boasted Trixie crossly. "I haven't really begun to think out things yet. Which of you would like a game of tennis on Friday night? I mean late, when we ought to be in bed. It's moonlight, and I thought we'd invite Dilly."

"Trix!" exclaimed Clare. "Not even you would be so mad as that."

"I'm not coming, thanks," said Patsy shortly. "We've always been jolly good pals, Trix, but I think this business has gone far enough and I'm quitting."

"I'm with you, Trix," cried Natalie. "If Dilly accepts we'll not be punished because we shall have a mistress with us. If she refuses to come, we need not go."

"Well spoken, Nat. I'll come too, Trix," decided Clare. "You coming, Phoebe?"

"Yes, I think so—if Maude and Edith will," Phoebe answered.

"If one more of you will come we'll have two sets," declared Trixie. "Seven of us, and Dilly. What about you, Judith? You play a decent game."

"I don't mind if I do," Judith replied, in a very fair imitation of Cook. "Will *you* send the invitation, Trix?" she added in her own voice.

"If you like; though I think 'twould be nicer if all seven of us signed it."

"So do I," agreed Natalie.

The invitation was duly written, signed, and delivered, and an answer was received on the Thursday morning.

"What does she say?" cried Clare.

"Let me see," begged Natalie.

"Read it to us, Trix," entreated Phoebe.

"If you'll all shut up for a minute, I will," Trixie told them. "Here we are. What posh paper!

> 'Miss Dillon thanks members of the Fourth for their kind invitation, which she has much pleasure in accepting.'"

read Trixie. "Short and to the point, anyway."

"Jumping Jupiter!" exclaimed Natalie. "I never thought she'd come. What do you think she has up her sleeve this time, Trix? She's a horrid way of getting her own back."

"Oh, there's nothing she can do *this* time," Trixie answered with more assurance than she really felt.

In spite of herself, Trixie was beginning grudgingly to admire the young mistress who seemed always to get the better of her.

"The House tennis matches are being played this Saturday after all," cried Patsy, dashing into the room at this minute. "I've just seen it up on the board. Valerie was pinning it up as I came through Big Hall."

"Goody!" exclaimed Clare. "I'm longing to see how we get on. I think our champions stand as good a chance as any."

"They certainly do," agreed Trixie. "Valerie and Marion ought to wipe the floor with the rest."

When the seven Fourth Formers reached the courts on Friday night they found Miss Dillon waiting for them.

"Come along, girls, I'm eager for a game," she greeted them pleasantly. "How are we going to play?"

"I think we'd better toss for it," mumbled Trixie, and the others agreed.

Soon they all had their partners. Trixie and Clare were to play Miss Dillon and Natalie, while Phoebe and Judith played Maude and Edith. It was soon obvious that Miss Dillon was an excellent player. No ball seemed too difficult for her to return, and her service left Trixie and Clare gasping. Trixie's service was good, but her back-handed strokes were weak, a fact that Eileen Dillon soon discovered. No one seemed to think it strange that before they had finished the first set, the others had stopped their game and Phoebe was acting as umpire.

"Forty–thirty," she called as Natalie served a double fault, a thing she rarely did. But her next ball was untakable, and so the game went to Miss Dillon and Natalie.

"We'd better pull up our socks," muttered Trixie as she and Clare crossed over. "You're best at the net while I'm serving. It's time we won a game."

"All right," laughed Clare, tossing back her curls, "but it's a ripping game."

"Trix and Clare are playing well now," observed Judith from her point of vantage. "They always combine toppingly, I think."

"Trix is brilliant, but Clare has more staying power," Maude pointed out. "She hangs on to everything like a bull terrier. Oh, well played, Trix! Jolly good shot!"

When the second set stood at five–two to Miss Dillon and Natalie, Trixie showed signs of tiring. It was obvious that the others were the better pair, though every point they won was hotly contested by their opponents. The next game was a ding-dong affair that ended in a win for Trixie and her partner. Then Clare lost her head. She was playing net, but it was pretty hopeless, for the balls were so swift that even when she hit one at all it nearly always went out. It was Miss Dillon's service, and she sent over a low, fast ball to Trixie. She managed to return it, but Natalie smashed it down close to the net, and it bounced high. Clare miscalculated her stroke and hit a weak lob that fell on the back line, sending up a cloud of chalk. Miss Dillon watched it fall, caught it at just the right minute, and sent it whizzing towards Trixie, who caught it on the run and returned it to Natalie. As it came back over the net, Clare tipped it, but failed to return it, and the point went to her opponents. Miss Dillon served again, and a long volley delighted Phoebe, Maude, Judith, and Edith. Trixie was smashing balls about in fine style, but she grew over-excited and lost her sense of accuracy. Then it was not long before Phoebe was calling:

"Set and match for Miss Dillon and Natalie."

"Jolly good game," observed Trixie, as she clapped Natalie on the back.

"All the thanks are due to my partner," laughed Natalie. "You play a super game, Miss Dillon."

"Thanks, Natalie, and thank you two, also, for some good sport. Your service is fast and reliable, Trixie."

Trixie flushed and looked awkward. Clare saved her from speaking by doing so herself.

"I've loved every minute of it, Miss Dillon," she cried enthusiastically. "Thanks heaps for giving us such a good game."

"I think we have all enjoyed it," answered the mistress with a smile. "But we must go to bed now. It is growing very late, or should I say early?"

"I'll own I'm sleepy," admitted Natalie. "And I should think you others must be cold hanging about and not playing."

"I'm not," declared Phoebe. "We brought our blazers with us, and it's a warm night."

"I promised Miss Underwood that we would be in bed by two o'clock," announced Miss Dillon. "She only allowed us to play to-night on condition we made up our lost sleep to-morrow afternoon. I have arranged with Matron for you seven to sleep from two till four this afternoon."

"But, Miss Dillon," burst out Trixie, "the House matches are being played then."

"So I understand, Trixie. It is a pity you will have to miss some of the games. Never mind, we all have to pay for our fun, I'm afraid. I shall be sorry not to see all the House games, but I have enjoyed playing with you girls and I'm quite ready to rest to-morrow. Now we must get to bed. Go quietly, all of you, or you will wake those already asleep. Have you others lowered your net? Good.

Then good-night, all of you, and thank you again for a pleasant interlude."

Once inside the dormitory, Trixie could restrain herself no longer.

"Of all the colossal reptiles, Dilly's the biggest," she exploded. "Fancy imagining for one moment that that potty little game to-night was worth missing a House Match for."

"To-night was your suggestion, old thing," Natalie pointed out; "and I can't help admiring the cute way Dilly had her own back on us. She's a ripping tennis player. Good enough for Wimbledon. Anyone who can play a game like that can't be such a ninny. I'm beginning to revise my opinion of our Form mistress."

"I loathe her more than ever," snapped Trixie. "But I'll have my revenge. Just you wait and see. I've another idea, and this time I *shan't* be the one to pay the piper."

"I hope it's nothing too mad," Clare said anxiously. "What do you intend to do now, Trix?"

"I'm going to old Theodora Turnbull's to-morrow to order a wedding cake," was Trixie's amazing answer.

"A—a wedding cake!" gasped Phoebe. "What on earth for?"

"For Dilly, of course. I shall send it to her anonymously with just a printed slip, FOR YOUR *FUTURE* HAPPINESS. Perhaps she'll take the hint and leave."

"Don't do it, Trix," begged Patsy, who had been wakened by Trixie's outburst. "It seems a horrid sort of joke to me."

"We don't see eye to eye since you turned pi, Patsy," said Trixie petulantly. "I've a pound that my godfather gave me, and I shall go and see old Theodora Turnbull to-morrow, or rather to-day. I don't care to see half the matches, so I shall pop down to the village at four o'clock."

"Do you think she'll do it without asking awkward questions, Trix?" enquired Natalie.

"Of course she will. I shall make out it's a great secret, and she loves a secret. Besides, Ada Skinner, old Ephraim's grand-daughter, is being married at the end of the month. She may think I want it for her."

And nothing the others could say would turn Trixie from her purpose. Directly she was free to leave her dormitory, she sped off to the village and the quaint old soul who continued to run the village bakery since her husband's death. There was no one in the shop when Trixie entered.

"Oh, Mrs. Turnbull," she burst out, "can you make me a wedding cake, and what would it cost?"

"A wedding cake, dearie?" murmured the old lady, looking at Trixie over the top of her spectacles.

"You'm very young to be wanting a wedding cake. But perhaps you'm ordering it for a friend."

"That's right, Mrs. Turnbull, I am," Trixie answered with her most winning smile. "Can you do me one for a pound?"

"Should think I could, dearie, if it weren't too rich. I've some decorations I've had by me for some time that I could use. A bit shop-soiled maybe, but not so you'd notice. A pair of doves with *silver* beaks, is one. I'll show you. The lady dove's got a lovely sprig of white heather in her mouth, and 'er 'usbin's got a silver slipper on a pink silk ribbon. There! Isn't that fine?"

"Lovely," said Trixie weakly. "When could I have the cake, Mrs. Turnbull?"

"In about a fortnight, dearie. It takes time, you know, and I'm not so young as I was. My poor old hands won't do the piping so quick, and I suppose you want two tiers."

"Yes, please. Make it two tiers, Mrs. Turnbull, even if it costs a little more."

"I will, dearie. I've some silver paper keys and hearts somewhere. I'll put them on, too. A girl only has one wedding cake in her life, so it's got to be fine. Ada Skinner will be coming along soon for her cake, I expect," went on the old soul, with a knowing nod. "You come in a fortnight to-day, missie, and I'll have it ready for you. Do you want it in a box?"

"Please, Mrs. Turnbull, and thanks heaps. Will you take the pound now, and if it's more I can pay you later."

"All right, dearie, if you'd rather. Theodora Turnbull never says no to good money, but she's straight, and likes to *earn* what she gets. I'll see you get a real nice cake. Would you like an almond slice to eat now? Here you are, dearie. I'm known for my almond paste, and it *is* good, though I says it as shouldn't. Good-bye, missie, and I'll do my best."

"How did you get on?" demanded Clare when Trixie joined her friends on the courts.

"Fine, thanks. Theo's going to create a royal cake complete with doves, slipper, key, white heather—or should I say grey?—and a silver heart. As I expected, she half-thinks it's for Ada Skinner." Trixie spoke jauntily, for she felt Patsy's disapproval, and her better nature knew that Patsy was right.

The next weeks were fairly peaceful, for Trixie was content to wait for her great joke, and most of the Fourth were beginning to like their new Form mistress. It was on a Wednesday afternoon that the bombshell exploded. Patsy had had her Irish mail, and among her letters was one from her old Nannie. As she read it her cheeks grew white, and tears throbbed at the back of her eyes. When she had finished she was very quiet for a little,

then she sprang to her feet and went in search of Trixie. She ran her to earth at the cricket nets.

"Trix, have you sent Dilly that cake yet?"

"Yes, lambkin. It was posted yesterday. She should get it to-day."

"Then you'll have to waylay the postman or something and intercept it. She mustn't have it."

"And why not?" demanded Trixie truculently.

"Read that, and perhaps you'll understand."

Trixie took the letter and read where Patsy pointed.

> ". . . You have a rare young lady teaching at St. Hilary's now. Her name is Eileen Dillon, and she's one of the cleverest and sweetest colleens I've ever known. Her mother, a beautiful lady, had a hard struggle to educate her boy and girl, but Miss Eileen was clever and worked hard. She earned a degree or something and was going to teach, when your own cousin Michael fell for her sweet ways. She was going to marry him, and the old castle was to be opened up and all. Everyone was so happy, and Lady Dillon so grateful to Master Michael for all his goodness to her daughter. Then Master Michael and Miss Eileen's brother went motoring one day—they went to the town for shopping, it's believed. On the return journey, the car ran off the road and they were both killed. No one knows how it happened, but it did, as you may have heard. Only her love for her mother saved Miss Eileen's reason, for she was devoted to them both. Master Michael had made no will, so everything went to his next of kin, and poor Miss Eileen had to turn out and earn her living. I'm glad she's at St. Hilary's, Patsy darlint, for you and your friends will be good to her and help her to forget. . . ."

Trixie read no more. She could not. She just looked at Patsy, murmured something about "you were right," and then rushed towards the house. Valerie Dare was in the hall, and Trixie went up to her.

"Has the post come, Valerie?" she asked.

"Yes, it has. There was nothing for you. Were you expecting something important?"

"Was there a parcel for Miss Dillon?"

"Yes, but I can't see how that——"

The Head Girl did not finish, for Trixie was running towards Miss Dillon's room like a mad thing.

. . . MISS DILLON, HER HEAD ON HER ARMS, SOBBING,

She hardly waited to knock at the door, but rushed in, only to discover that she was too late. On the table lay a half-opened parcel, and beside it sat Miss Dillon, her head on her arms, sobbing. At Trixie's noisy entrance she looked up.

"Trixie Davenport, what are you doing here?" she demanded, choking back her tears and struggling to regain her composure. "I did not give you permission to enter."

"I—I'm sorry, Miss Dillon, but I wanted to be in time to prevent your opening that parcel. It was a beastly joke, and I'd give everything I possess to have stopped that parcel from reaching you."

"You—you sent it?" asked Miss Dillon.

"Yes. I thought it would be fun, but I see now it was a caddish trick. I—I was angry that we had you for our Form mistress when you'd been teaching the babes, and then when you always scored I grew vindictive. Patsy and lots of the others wanted me to stop japing you, but I wouldn't, and now—and now I've hurt you desperately."

"What makes you think that, Trixie?"

"Patsy had a letter from her old nurse, and she let me read part of it. It was about you."

"I see. But you didn't know about me when you sent the cake?"

"Good heavens, no! I may be a rotter, but not so bad as that. I'm desperately sorry and ashamed now, and I can't expect you to forgive me."

"If I do, Trix, will you give me a square deal?"

"I'll do more than that," promised Trixie. "I'll back you up all the time, and I'll stop playing my stupid tricks. I'll be an angel and——"

"But I don't want an angel," interrupted Miss Dillon, with a tremulous smile. "I just want the real warm-hearted Trixie I know you are. That's all."

"You mean you've forgiven me?"

"Yes, child. I think you have learnt your lesson. In future we shall understand each other better. What can we do with this cake?"

"Old Ephraim the gardener's grand-daughter, Ada Skinner, is being married in about a week, Miss Dillon. Could we give it to her from you and the Fourth?"

"Our first united action, Trix, and a very nice one, too. Ada shall have the cake, for I have gained something better than a cake to-day." She smiled at Trixie's look of amazement. "I have gained the allegiance of a loyal little rebel."

BENNY THE BEE

By M. P. BROWN

BENNY the Bee gaily circled the air,
Drank of the morning so fresh and so fair,
Fragrances sweet all his senses enfolding,
Beauty all massed for his joyous beholding.

Slow nodding daffodils gladdened his eye,
Their golden seduction tempting him by;
Sweet smelling hyacinths, sprinkled with dew,
Opened their petals enticingly too.

Flowers of garden and meadow, and hue
Richly varied, lay bared to his view;
Blossoms of fruit trees, the blossoms of May,
Around on the ground like a carpet lay.

Naught in that dawning but colour and light,
Naught save the sun and the flowers so bright;
Naught save blue heaven with white clouds on high,
Trailing their billowing mistiness by.

Benny the Bee had a light in his eye
As eager, expectant, he winged lightly by;
And he felt deep within him a want he had known
To possess all this beauty himself for his own.

To extract from each flower, every blossom and tree,
A fragment of beauty, of tranquility;
An essence of fragrances scenting the air,
Pervading that morning, so sunny and fair.

Into trumpets of daffodils plunging his face,
Withdrawing the sweetness from each golden grace;
From all petalled loveliness sucking the dew,
From all flow'ring daintiness nectar he drew.

And he called all the bees of the air to his aid,
And the gath'rings of each one were frugally laid
In a hive which with beeswax was carefully sealed,
The honey of trees, flowers, meadow and field.

And that is the reason on warm, sunny days,
When the sun sheds around its beneficent rays,
You may see in each flower, every blossom and tree,
All the brothers and sisters of Benny the Bee.

All of them gathering busily, too,
The sweetness of nature to bring it to you,
As honey for breakfast or dinner or tea,
A tribute to beauty by Benny the Bee.

THE NEW GIRL AT VALECROFT

by Winifred Bear

SHE WAS STARING AT A MAN'S FACE OUTSIDE THE WINDOW.

"AH! Margaret, you are the very person I want. Can you spare a few minutes?"

"Of course, Miss Simley." Something had happened to put her out, I decided: there were spots of pink on both cheeks; her eyes were unnaturally bright. It takes a good deal to discompose our cheerful, good-natured little Head; but I *had* seen these symptoms in her before—on Speech Days and Parents' "At Home" afternoons, when some of the visitors were proving "difficult."

Apparently it was something of the same sort now. As she led me swiftly towards the drawing-room, she explained a little breathlessly, "A new girl has turned up unexpectedly, Margaret. Indeed, the case is most unusual for I had no idea the girl was coming at all, even that she existed! Of course, in the ordinary way I should not accept her without previous arrangement, in the middle of the spring term too. But according to her aunt who has accompanied her all the way from West Ireland, she is the daughter of an old Valecroft girl, Millicent O'Brien."

"I have noticed her name on the register of Old Girls in the library, Miss Simley," I put in.

Miss Simley nodded. "She left at the end of my first term here, so I can't say I remember her very well. But from the little I do remember, her daughter seems to resemble her, anyway in looks. A few years after leaving here she married Lord Dunkerry, and Thomasina, I now learn, is their only child."

Miss Simley slightly emphasized the last two words; as though she had already twigged something about the new girl not entirely to her credit, or the advantage of the school. I followed her into the drawing-room, trying, not very successfully I'm afraid, to copy her pose of brisk, bright efficiency.

Aunt and niece both stared at me—and went on staring. The aunt was a pale-faced, shrunken-looking woman of uncertain age with cold grey slits of eyes that struck me as sly. Thomasina, I suppose, was what some people would call pretty. I don't think it is because I am dark, brown-faced, and slim myself, so that Lady Thomasina's fair, fluffy hair, reaching almost to her shoulders, her wide violet-blue eyes and round, rosy face didn't appeal to me at all. I dare say it was her expression, pouting and petulant, and her rather lumpy body that put me off.

Miss Simley introduced me to the aunt first, of

course. "Our head prefect, Margaret Jamieson, Miss O'Brien."

Miss O'Brien nodded stiffly and held out her gloved hand. (Wasn't that wrong? I thought. But a lady so socially élite must know!) "Plaised to meet you, I'm shure," she drawled.

Lady Thomasina just shook hands and answered my smile with an impassive stare. But I went on smiling to back up Miss Simley who was doing the same.

"Thomasina is nearly sixteen, Margaret," she told me, "so probably she will be in the Lower Fifth. That matter, however, we can settle to-morrow. As there is a vacant cubicle in Dormitory C, I have asked Matron to put her there. Perhaps you will introduce her to the other girls in that dormitory, will you, Margaret? I believe they are all Upper Fourth and Lower Fifth Form girls?"

"Yes, Miss Simley," I said.

Miss Simley continued to smile. "That's settled then. If you can find one or two of the girls now, and they are free, perhaps they will help Thomasina to unpack and tell her what she requires in the way of clothes to complete her outfit."

She turned to the aunt again. "You did say, didn't you, Miss O'Brien, that you are authorized by Lady Dunkerry to buy anything Thomasina needs before you return to Ireland?"

"Shure," Miss O'Brien nodded. "But it will have to be to-morrow I buy them, for my boat sails the next morning. My niece will be permitted to come out with me for the purpose?"

"Yes, we will arrange that," Miss Simley promised with a glance at her surly new pupil (or was she just shy?). "Very likely you have brought some clothes you will not require here, Thomasina," she suggested tactfully. But her tone, though still kind, was firm as she continued, "You are allowed two afternoon frocks in addition to your school uniform. They may be of any material and style you please, so long as they are not garish or too decorative. You may not keep with you any jewellery, except your wristlet watch if you have one, or any money over sixpence. That you should keep in your pocket. The rest, and any jewellery you have, must be handed over to Matron at once. If you are going out and require money for any purpose, she will let you have it. You are not allowed to wear jewellery in term-time except one brooch or necklace on social occasions. Anything in this way you have brought will be returned to you at the end of term."

Thomasina made no response to this long speech; only opened her violet eyes extra wide, then narrowed them and glanced quickly at her aunt. Miss O'Brien, looking at her hands demurely folded in her lap, murmured compliantly, "A verry wise rule, Miss Simley, I am shure."

Thomasina was scowling as we left the room. In the corridor she turned to me and enquired sarcastically, "Say, what's this hole I've come to? A modern boarding-school, or a nunnery?"

I was up in arms at once. True, when I first came to the school myself as a kid of thirteen, I grumbled a bit at losing the beads and so forth I'd brought from home, not to mention all my cash, save a niggardly sixpence. But I soon understood why the rule had been made, as I tried to explain to Thomasina now.

"Miss Simley thinks it's wrong to put temptation in people's way."

Thomasina looked at me oddly for a second or two, then giggled. "May the saints preserve us! What a place! Is it the girls, teachers, or servants your old Mother Simley's afraid'll turn robbers?"

My anger was fairly up now. "Don't be silly, Thomasina!" I told her sharply. "You ought to know that some people are weaker than others where honesty is concerned, and if such people are hard up, naturally the temptation to take things—money particularly—is very strong, if they see it about."

I paused, wondering whether to tell her about Nelly Atkins. I decided to risk it. "For example"—my voice had dropped almost to a whisper—"we have a young maid here whose brothers have been convicted for poaching, and on one or two occasions she has helped them. But she is a nice girl and Miss Simley wanted to remove her from a bad home background and give her a chance to live honestly. As she has done, ever since she has been here, which is over three years now," I concluded with emphasis.

Thomasina laughed harshly. "Shouldn't be so sure if I were you. Probably she's more clever than her brothers, and that's how she has pulled it off without getting nabbed!"

"How dare you suggest such a thing!" I cried angrily, resisting a strong desire to shake the pert little wretch with her "knowing" smile!

"You've a pretty good opinion of your *own* cleverness in another direction, haven't you?" she went on.

My cheeks were flaming, but with an effort I kept my control and reminded her quietly that I was two years her senior, apart from being head prefect.

She tossed her head, and the black scowl returned to her brow.

"There's something I'll remind *you* of now, Miss Hoity-Toity," she sneered. "You've known me about five minutes and here you are dropping my title as though I were your best friend."

"You rotten little snob!" I blazed.

She stared at me haughtily for a minute or two, then suddenly her gaze faltered, and, "I—I'm sorry. I didn't understand," she said quietly.

This drastic change of front took away my breath,

MY ANGER WAS FAIRLY UP NOW.

and made me murmur awkwardly and perhaps too conciliatorily, "That's all right, Thomasina. If you have always been addressed with your title in Ireland, except by relatives and intimate friends, naturally it sounds cheek on my part to drop it right away. But the other girls will do the same, I warn you. As a matter of fact, there is another titled girl at the school—Sir Peter Erling's daughter, Ellen. But she would laugh in her shy way—she's an awfully quiet, shy kid—if any of us were to call her Lady Ellen—though it isn't such a mouthful, is it, as Lady Thomasina?"

Thomasina laughed in a friendly way for the first time; but it was a constrained laugh. And seeing her eyes suddenly with the light full on them, I was startled by their haggard, deeply unhappy look. "At a distance she looks younger than sixteen," I thought. "Close up, she looks years older."

I came across a couple of Dormitory C girls a few minutes later. They were an amiable, good-natured pair from the Upper Fourth, so with a sense of relief (disguised, I hope), I introduced Thomasina and left her in their charge.

Later in the evening I asked them, in a voice purposely casual, how they had fared with her.

"Oh, all right," said one.

The other girl shook her head. "I can't say I took to her. There seems something queer and secretive about her if you know what I mean. Irish people are generally so talkative, aren't they; but perhaps being a lord's daughter, Thomasina was squashed a lot by strict nurses and governesses when she was a kid.

"She didn't strike me as being 'squashed'!" I laughed, adding quickly, "At first she didn't, anyway—I wasn't so sure afterwards. Had she a lot of money and jewellery to hand over?"

The girls shook their heads, and the first replied, "Matron came in while we were unpacking and Thomasina showed her what was in her purse. There was only seven-and-two altogether. I suppose as her parents didn't see the Prospectus before they sent her they didn't know that Upper School girls nowadays are expected to bring with them at least a pound for pocket-money and etceteras. I dare say in her mother's time it wasn't so much."

"Probably not," I agreed. "Hadn't she much jewellery either?"

"Only a brooch and a necklace," the second girl told me. "Quite pretty, but not at all expensive, I should say. She has a gold watch, though, that looks pretty good."

CHAPTER II

THOMASINA settled down better than I expected. Miss Otry, the Music mistress, soon discovered that she had a lovely clear soprano voice and captured her for the choir. She was good at hockey, too, and I prophesied (not to Thomasina herself) that she would have a place in the team next year when some of the present members would have left. Only at lessons she was sadly behind, hardly up to Upper Fourth standard where the average age, with the year half-gone, was fifteen and a quarter.

Her aunt presumably returned to Ireland as arranged. But about a fortnight later she wrote to ask if Thomasina could go out one half-holiday with an uncle, one of her father's brothers who lived in England and was visiting the district. I overheard her telling a form-mate beforehand that she was going to Matron for the five shillings cash she had left, out of her original seven-and-two.

" Of course, Uncle will pay my exes and give me a bit as well, I hope," she said. " But I'm not going to risk looking silly by having no money at all with me ! "

Apparently she also asked Matron for her necklace which she wanted to wear : though I didn't know that till the following morning when she came to my study, looking pale and subdued and a little bit frightened, I thought.

" I say, Margaret, I don't want to make a fuss," she whispered. " B—but I'm afraid I've lost some money—and other things."

" When ? " I asked sharply.

" Just after I came in last night—at least, not more than half an hour after. I left the five pound-notes Uncle gave me with my necklace and watch on my dressing-table, and went to the bathroom to wash. When I came back they had gone."

" What time was this ? " I asked her.

She pondered. " It must have been about twenty to seven. Anyway, the first supper-bell rang just after I went back from the bathroom. I—I didn't tell the other girls when they came in. I thought I'd better not."

I nodded gravely. " You were right there. But you must have known, Thomasina, that you are not supposed to go to your dormitory without permission before that bell."

" I'd been out, so naturally——"

" I'm sure Matron told you to report to her as soon as you came in," I interrupted. " She always does, even though the rest of us already know that we are supposed to."

" Well, perhaps she did," Thomasina admitted sullenly. " It's a daft rule anyway, and I couldn't find her."

" Nonsense ! " I rapped out. " She is on medicine duty in the sick-bay at that time, as you know quite well." (Thomasina had had a stye on her eye a few days before and had had to go to Matron at her duty times to have it treated.) " Besides, you know the rule about money and jewellery," I went on. " You must have known you were doing very wrong to take five pounds to your cubicle."

Thomasina flushed, scowled, and pouted, exactly as she had done on her first evening.

" I'm jolly well fed up with this blinking hole ! " she cried. " Uncle Arthur agrees with me it's simply monstrous that a girl can't leave anything she likes in her own cubicle without fear of its being pinched."

I bit my lip. I had no doubt that other girls had occasionally done the same as Thomasina, through absent-mindedness, or because, like her, they couldn't be bothered to go to Matron immediately on coming in. Yet only once in my five years at the school had anything been stolen before ; then it was something quite small—a hand-mirror by a junior girl who had broken her own, just like it, and wanted to avoid having to confess the mishap to her parents. It was most unfortunate that a comparatively big theft should have occurred so soon after Thomasina's arrival.

I was still wondering what to reply to her latest taunt when there was a gentle tap on the door, and Ellen Erling peeped in. Seeing Thomasina, she flushed and apologized.

" I didn't know there was anyone else here, Margaret. I'm sorry."

" That's all right, Ellen. Thomasina's just going, aren't you, Thomasina ? " I looked at her pointedly. She shrugged her shoulders, stuck out her chin, and marched through the door, shutting it noisily after her.

I smiled at Ellen who smiled back shyly. But I knew at once that there was something bothering her underneath.

" Nothing seriously wrong, I hope, Ellen ? " I asked a trifle anxiously.

She hesitated. " Well, the things I've lost are not worth making a fuss about—the black patent shoes I wear in the evening and a pair of silk stockings——"

I cut her short. " You mean you have really lost them, Ellen—not just mislaid ? "

" Well, we have looked everywhere. I knew I shouldn't have much time to change for supper, as I had a music lesson till quarter to seven, so I left my shoes and stockings ready on a chair in my cubicle. When I found them missing I asked the girls in the next-door cubicles if they had ' walked off ' with them." She smiled a little to show she was joking. " Of course, I thought they *were* just mislaid then—so did all the girls. If I had known they were not going to turn up I shouldn't have let it get round I'd missed them. As it had been circulated, all I could do was to warn the other girls not to spread it any

further. I kept on my school shoes and found another pair of stockings."

Ellen stopped abruptly. Her face was red and distressed. "I thought I ought to report the matter, Margaret," she added quietly. "I—I didn't want to."

"I am sure you didn't, Ellen," I reassured her. "You sleep in Dormitory D, don't you?"

"Yes, in the second cubicle on the right side of the door."

"I suppose you don't happen to know which maid was on dormitory duty last night?" I tried to speak off-handedly. But Ellen twigged what I was getting at; and her face was more troubled than ever as she replied:

"I'm afraid it was Nelly Atkins. Some of the girls remember that Betty was on duty the night before, and Judy the night before that, and those three take it in turns, don't they?"

I nodded gravely. The "duty" consists of drawing down the blinds in each cubicle and turning back the bedcovers. "I'm afraid there's nothing else for it, Ellen," I said. "I shall have to report the wretched business to Miss Simley."

"Why not wait a little longer—say till this afternoon?" Ellen suggested. "I can't see at the moment where the things can possibly turn up from, but it's generally like that when you've lost something, isn't it—until it does turn up?"

There was a shadow of a smile on Ellen's face which I felt too anxious and miserable to return.

"I'm sorry, Ellen," I told her brusquely. "If yours was the only loss I would wait. But there is another a good deal more serious."

I told her about Thomasina.

CHAPTER III

THE prayer-bell rang as I concluded, so I waited behind in the Hall to speak to Miss Simley after prayers. I was glad that no other girl had business with her that morning, but I had hardly finished my report when I saw Miss Nodd, the Housekeeper, waiting at the bottom of the platform steps.

"I won't keep you any longer now, Miss Simley," I added hastily, glad of an excuse to escape from this horribly embarrassing situation.

But Miss Simley said, "Just a minute, Margaret," and signed to Miss Nodd to step forward.

"Did you wish to speak to me privately, Miss Nodd?" she enquired. "If so, I wonder if you can wait for just a few minutes. Margaret has been telling me something rather important, and I must decide quickly how to act."

Miss Nodd darted me a quick look, then turned to Miss Simley again. "It has nothing to do with lost property, Miss Simley?" she enquired warily.

"I regret to say it has, Miss Nodd. According to Margaret, one girl has lost a pair of shoes and stockings; another girl, a necklace, a gold watch, and five pounds in notes which, against our strict rule, she took to her cubicle last night after returning from an outing with her uncle. You have heard about it?"

"About Lady Thomasina Dunkerry's losses, yes," Miss Nodd replied. "I was not aware that a second girl had lost things." She frowned slightly and shook her head. "I am very sorry that Lady Thomasina saw fit to mention the matter to Nelly at all; it was surely extremely bad taste on her part to refer to the young Atkins' poaching activities which are ancient history now. I suppose Lady Thomasina was very much upset and angry, and didn't stop to think."

"That is no excuse," Miss Simley broke in sternly. "Lady Thomasina is not a little child, and brought up as she has been she should have learnt to control her emotions by this time. Who told her about Nelly's past, I wonder? I thought only the few Upper School girls who were here when the poaching incidents occurred knew about them. Surely those girls have enough sense not to rake up what, as you say, Miss Nodd, is quite ancient history now."

She glanced at me as she concluded, and my scarlet cheeks would have given me away, I'm afraid, if I hadn't made up my mind to confess in any case.

Luckily, Miss Simley is one of the few people who can be fair and reasonable when you know they must be burning with vexation inside.

"I can see that in the circumstances you thought it would impress Thomasina if you gave Nelly's case as an example, Margaret," she said. "All the same, considering that Thomasina seems so lacking in discretion, it would have been much better if you hadn't."

She turned to the Housekeeper again. "Nelly is seriously annoyed, Miss Nodd?"

"She says she'll pack her box and go home this evening if the real thief is not discovered," Miss Nodd replied.

Miss Simley frowned and heaved a small sigh. Then pulling herself together, she spoke in her usual calm, brisk voice.

"I shall summon the whole school—mistresses, girls, maids—at Break to-day. The guilty person will be given until lunch-time to confess, with the promise that if she does so I shall not put the matter in the hands of the police; though, of course, it will be impossible for me to allow her to remain here. In the circumstances it is very unlikely, I am afraid, that she will confess; in which case everyone

in turn will have to open her drawers, desk, and locker for my inspection. I shall give instructions meanwhile for dormitory and bedroom doors to be locked: anyone who wishes to enter them will have to go accompanied by Miss Nodd, Matron, or myself."

CHAPTER IV

I SHAN'T forget in a hurry the rest of that dreadful day. As usual, we stood behind our chairs in the dining-hall when the bell rang for lunch, waiting for Miss Simley and the staff to enter. Generally we chattered gaily till the girl holding the door open ready for them gave the sign that the staff were coming. That day we waited in gloomy silence, broken by a few nervous whispers and giggles from the younger girls; and when the sign was given—well, I know how I felt, and I doubt if many girls had any more appetite for the stewed steak and dumplings we were about to eat.

By the solemn look on Miss Simley's face I knew at once that her surmise was right: no one had confessed. So we had all to go through the wretched and in many cases embarrassing ordeal of laying bare our most private and cherished possessions to Miss Simley's critical eye.

Again, however, her sense of fairness eased the anxiety of many girls. "This is not a tidiness inspection," she declared, "and if perchance I find any banned articles in any girl's drawer or locker, she will not be punished this time; though of course I shall confiscate them and expect the girl to promise not to repeat the offence."

Lessons were a farce that afternoon; though the mistresses did their noble best to encourage a "business as usual" spirit, while their pupils were called away in little groups, according to where they slept. All the dormitory girls were called first; then the Upper Fifth and Sixth Form girls who sleep in bedrooms; then the maids. Miss Simley intended to call the mistresses last, I believe; which would have been horribly embarrassing for all concerned. It wasn't necessary. At four o'clock we were all summoned to the Hall again. . . .

Miss Simley told us quietly and gravely that Ellen's shoes and stockings and Thomasina's watch and necklace had been found (and identified by the owners) in Nelly Atkins' trunk which she kept hidden away under her bed. Miss Simley's keen eye spotted it, however, and I learnt afterwards that when she insisted upon Nelly opening it, Nelly protested vehemently. There was nothing in it except a few papers and suchlike, she asserted. Miss Simley found, in addition to the incriminating articles, a batch of grimy paper-covered novelettes containing sentimental or sensational stories, unfit for the highbrow eye of a Head mistress!

Of course, Nelly vigorously denied having stolen the articles, Miss Simley said, and professed to be horrified when they were discovered in her trunk. The five pound-notes had not been found. Apparently Nelly had been out for an hour after supper the previous evening. Miss Simley feared she disposed of the money then, perhaps handed it over to a relative or friend. . . . She would be confined to her room in Miss Nodd's custody till the following morning. Miss Simley would then have to inform the police, but she had assured Nelly that the magistrates in court would view her offence less seriously if the missing five pounds had been returned.

"I want you to understand, girls," Miss Simley concluded, her voice so solemn and low that if she hadn't been standing there before us it would have been hard to believe that it was our brisk, cheery Head mistress speaking, "that some people have moral kinks or diseases which are harder to cure as a rule than physical ones. But when a moral delinquent, as such people are called, are as young as Nelly they often can be cured. That is why nowadays they are not as a rule sent to prison for a first offence, but to special schools where they are helped and encouraged to live honestly. That is probably what will happen to Nelly."

In spite of this reassurance, some nervous girls among the juniors were reduced to tears. Ellen was her usual quiet, calm self on the surface; but I knew she was feeling sore underneath. Thomasina held up her head and pouted out her lips aggressively. But the expression in her eyes was agonized. My best friend, Jean Evans, who generally takes a leading part in school plays, noticed them too, and whispered to me that Thomasina would make a good Lady Macbeth when we came to rehearse *Macbeth* for the Speech Day performance.

"I expect she's worrying in case she never sees her five quid again," I declared, trying to sound mildly contemptuous.

But in my heart I didn't really think it was that. Was Thomasina, like Ellen, feeling unhappy about Nelly? True, she didn't know her as Ellen did, who had been at the school for four years. But Nelly is one of those unobtrusively helpful people who are a boon and a blessing to the strange and lonely.

I suppose that was why little Rita Scott, who had come to the school at half-term, so was almost as new as Thomasina, was so particularly upset that evening. Matron spoke to me about her after she had gone to bed in Dormitory F of which I was the prefect in charge.

"I've had a job to settle her down, Margaret. I think she will go to sleep all right now. But if you should be disturbed in the night——"

" I shan't mind an atom, of course, Matron," I assured her. " Still, I hope for her own sake the poor kid is in the happy end of dreamland now, and will stay there till to-morrow morning ! "

Until three weeks before, my bedroom had been almost opposite Dormitory F. Then a piece had fallen out of the ceiling, almost on to my bed, and as the whole ceiling was cracked, Miss Simley wouldn't risk my sleeping there any more until it was repaired. So I had to shift into a cupboard of a room at the end of the corridor.

I was lying there at nearly midnight that night, wishing I could forget the day's rotten affair and go to sleep, when I heard a light tap on my door. " Come in ! " I called, and switched on the light over my bed. I wasn't surprised to see a little girl from Dormitory F standing in the doorway.

" Is it Rita ? " I asked.

The child nodded. " Yes. She dreamt that Nelly Atkins was sent to a Nazi concentration camp. And though she's wide awake now we can't get her to believe that Nelly isn't going to that sort of place to-morrow."

" Right-o, Norah. Toddle back to bed and I'll be along in a jiffy," I told her.

Although there is electric light in all rooms, the school corridors are still gas-lit. This is convenient at night because two gas-jets in each corridor, one at each end, can be left burning at a glimmer to give anyone who has to pass along just enough light dimly to see their way.

I found Dormitory F brilliantly illumined and gave instant orders for all lights except Rita's to be turned off at once. I wasn't going to let hers burn longer than I could help.

" Now stop that crying, Rita, and don't be a silly baby," I told her, in what I hope was a firm, kind tone. " You have been awake long enough now to have recovered from your bad dream, and to see how stupid it was."

" It's what's really going to happen all the same," Rita sobbed. " P-poor Nelly—and she was so kind to me when I came. She gave me her teddy-bear to cuddle—the one she took to bed with her every night when she was a little girl and which she couldn't bear to leave behind when she came here. . . . There'll be no one to be kind to her in the concentration camp ! "

I explained as patiently as I could, without making it out to be a sort of luxury hotel, that the school Nelly would probably be sent to was not a scrap like any concentration camp—Nazi or other-

IT WAS ONLY A BAD DREAM.

wise—that has ever existed. Rita's sobs died down at last, and the suggestion of a night-light, which I took from the small emergency supply in the dormitory cupboard, finished them.

" Well, that's that. Now perhaps I'll get a peep into dreamland myself," I thought as I hurried back along the corridor.

I was just shutting my bedroom door when I saw a figure emerge from the doorway of Dormitory C, which was in the corridor crossing the one I had just been down. As the girl was moving towards me, I waited quietly till her head came under the gas-jet. I suppressed a start when I saw who it was.

" Something wrong, Thomasina ? " I whispered.

She started as though an electric shock had gone through her, and gasped, " I—I didn't notice you, Margaret. . . . N-no, there is nothing wrong. I—I thought I heard someone moving about, that's all, so popped along to investigate."

" You heard me," I told her, trying hard to take her statement at its face value, but not succeeding. I went on to explain about Rita.

" I haven't had a chance to dream myself yet," Thomasina sighed. " Simply can't get off."

" Same here," I grunted. " Still, I'm going to have another shot now, and I reckon you'd better do the same, Thomasina. Get back to bed, anyway. It's against rules for girls to leave their dormitories during the night unless somebody is ill."

I couldn't see the expression on her face, but she nodded and went at once. I watched her turn into her dormitory before I returned to bed—leaving my door slightly ajar.

It was no use my pretending any longer that my suspicions were not roused. Thomasina's five pounds were easily accounted for, I surmised—they didn't exist ! As for the other articles, her own and Ellen's, it was she who had taken them and hidden them in Nelly's trunk. But for what purpose ? The girl had certainly never done her any harm, and she had gained nothing materially.

" *So far,*" whispered a small voice deep down inside me. I didn't want to hear it, because it made me ask the obvious question : *Where had Thomasina been going to when I stopped her ?* What she had said about hearing someone I was fairly sure was a lie.

I couldn't stay in bed any longer. My door being open would make it difficult for Thomasina to slip past it and down the staircase without my hearing. But she might manage it. At the bottom of the stairs there was a passage on the right leading to the Office, where the school's most important papers were kept—and an iron safe containing our money and jewellery.

I felt for my dressing-gown and slippers again ; donned them quickly ; slid along the corridor ; down the stairs—silently as a cat. And the school cat, Deb, a sprightly young tabby, was sitting in a pool of moonlight on the window-ledge almost opposite the Office door.

As I approached, she arched her back, then crouched at one end of the ledge. It was not I who had alarmed her : she was staring at a man's face outside the window, pressed close up against the glass—a coarse, red, extremely bad-tempered-looking face.

He signed to me impatiently to open the window, which I did—promptly. He evidently couldn't see me at all clearly.

" You promised to be here at midnight sharp," he growled, " and it struck a good ten minutes ago. Now look alive, girl, and show me where the Office place is."

I moved slightly, so that the moonlight fell on my face. He staggered back, his eyes filled with terror.

" May the blessed saints preserve us," he gasped, " it isn't Thomasina at all ! "

I turned just after and saw Thomasina behind me, shaking like a leaf. I brushed past her to where the school-bell stood on a table against the wall, picked it up and clanged it for all I was worth.

People were streaming down the stairs within three minutes—girls, mistresses, maids, doing up their dressing-gowns as they ran.

" What is it ? What's up ? " they cried.

" A burglar ! " I cried. " No, he hasn't been in—I was just in time to stop him."

Hearing a voice murmur something about phoning the police, I added quickly, " I am sure he has nothing at all to do with Nelly."

I wouldn't even look at Thomasina. But suddenly she grabbed my arm and looked up at me pleadingly. " Forgive me, Margaret," she whispered, and burst into tears.

Miss Simley in her rose silk dressing-gown stepped up briskly and laid an arm round her shoulders. " Pull yourself together, Thomasina," she told her quietly and firmly. " Margaret shall come with you to my bedroom and we'll listen to what you have to say."

CHAPTER V

It was an extraordinary story that she told us, in a low, broken, deeply ashamed voice. To encourage her to begin, Miss Simley said gravely, but not unkindly, " I am afraid that you and your aunt and uncle, Thomasina, have been imposing on me and on the whole school. You are not, of course, Lady Dunkerry's daughter ? "

Miss Simley, I am sure, was as astonished as I was when Thomasina burst out, " I *am* Lady Dunkerry's daughter, and Mr. and Mrs. Paine are *not* my uncle and aunt," with such a genuine ring

in her voice that it was impossible to think she was lying.

Neither of us said anything, however, but waited for the rest of her story, which briefly was this :

As a baby at Dunkerry Castle, Thomasina had had a nurse who had been deeply devoted to her. Her mother, Lady Dunkerry, on the contrary, disliked her intensely. Her dislike turned to positive hatred when her second child, a beautiful baby boy, was born. The nurse thereupon offered to take Thomasina to England and bring her up as her own child. Lady Dunkerry, and Lord Dunkerry too, were only too glad to get rid of her.

Shortly afterwards the nurse died, leaving Thomasina in the care of her brother and his wife. They told her, as soon as she was old enough to understand, that she was Lady Dunkerry's cast-off child and they intended to send her in due course to Valecroft House, her mother's old boarding-school. When she left there, a beautiful accomplished young lady, she must go to Ireland and present herself to Lord and Lady Dunkerry, who would then love her as before they had hated her.

Apparently it was not until she was eleven or twelve that she realized that her uncle was a " gentleman burglar." At first she was horrified, but he told her that like her hero, Robin Hood, he stole from the rich and gave to the poor (he subscribed to several charities in his town). He had never asked her to help him in his burgling until she went to Valecroft : then he only did so, he said, because otherwise he would not be able to pay the fees. At first she refused, but so keen was she to go to her mother's school and be educated as a lady should that finally she consented, just for once, to do as her uncle asked.

There was silence for a few moments after Thomasina concluded. Then Miss Simley took her hand and said in a gentle, strangely moved voice, " You have acted very foolishly and wrongly, my child, as I think you realize. But I feel that you have been more sinned against than sinning. To what extent you have been deceived I can only guess at present. Of one thing I am fairly sure : if you *were* Lady Dunkerry's daughter she would never have abandoned you in the way that you have been told she did. I will write to her and see what she replies."

CHAPTER VI

EARLY next morning came a message from the police station. Jarvis Paine had been arrested and charged with several actual burglaries, as well as the attempted one at our school. He was in prison awaiting trial.

This took place a week later. Lord and Lady Dunkerry were in court and told how their baby girl, when five months old, had been stolen from her pram when her nurse left it for a few minutes to go into a shop. Of course, the local police were informed at once and finally all the police forces in the British Isles and the New World were searching. Railway stations, shipping, and air ports were watched. Many people in court remembered the tragedy, which had been a " front-page " story in the newspapers sixteen years before. As the months went by and the child was still missing the grief-stricken parents were forced to admit that as babies change so quickly they would never be able to identify their own now if they passed her in the street.

At this stage the prisoner was questioned, and, seeing perhaps that a lie would not be believed in any case, he admitted that he and his wife had stolen Thomasina and taken her to the heart of a busy city in the north of England where babies swarmed in every street. Their first idea was to hold her for ransom. But Mrs. Paine developed an affection for her, so they decided to bring her up as their own child. When she was four years old, however, she was so like Lady Dunkerry (as they remembered her) that they decided to tell her that she was the Dunkerrys' abandoned child and send her, when old enough, to Lady Dunkerry's boarding-school. When she left, a beautiful, accomplished young lady and went to Ireland to make herself known to her parents, they (Mr. and Mrs. Paine) would quietly disappear. Bad as they were in some ways, their consciences smote them when they realized that they were spoiling her life.

Of course, Lord and Lady Dunkerry were overjoyed at getting her back at last. As for Thomasina herself, she would have been head over heels with joy had it not been for the black cloud of shame that overhung her. She had been a burglar's accomplice ; she quite expected to be expelled. And, of course, any ordinary head mistress would have expelled her promptly. Those of us who knew Miss Simley well, however, were not surprised when we heard that she intended to let her stay on—and show the sort of girl she could be.

That was sixteen months ago. As I write this my career at Valecroft is drawing near its end. I have just seen the list of prefects for next year. Thomasina's name heads it. I am not surprised.

No bees, no honey,
No work, no money.

Old Proverb.

MYSTERY AT ST. MILDRED'S

by PATRICIA WESTLEY

MYSTERY had burst upon St. Mildred's. Molly Palmer, the most popular girl of the Fourth had, it seemed, been spirited away.

Flo Barry had brought the startling news from the village where Molly, a day student, lived with her Aunt Lucy. Molly helped with the small but snug café where her chums loved to call for tea and cake. Molly, claimed Flo, in her shrill voice, had vanished as completely as a bursted soap bubble.

" Of all the rot ! " Betty Drew retorted scathingly, as the Fourth Formers streamed out to the playing fields following lesson hours that morning. " Why on earth should Molly take it into her head to vanish ? She's been as chirpy as a lark ever since we've known her. Flo must have the yarn all wrong. She's thinking of that fat serving of Aunt Lucy's lovely cake that vanished into her tummy when she sneaked down to the village to-day."

But Pam Gray, who had shared Molly's sparkling friendship with Betty, shook her brown curls, her blue eyes wide and pensive.

" Molly didn't show up here this morning," she declared in that wise way of hers when up against a tough problem. " Never before has that happened since we've known her. But I've a feeling in my bones that Flo is right."

Betty nodded her freckled face. Leaving the playing fields, soon they were swinging along the dusty road that ran on through the village to the miles of wild moorland beyond.

Pam was in one of her most thoughtful moods. Already, in that deep calculating way of hers, she suspected the truth behind Molly's supposed disappearance.

" It's just rot ! " Betty kept telling herself. She believed the disappearance of Molly of the dusky hair and olive skin as improbable as the disappearance of her own annoying freckles overnight. Molly was so attached to everything and everybody in the district ; so keen on her school lessons, helping kindly Aunt Lucy with her popular little café, and, in particular, her music.

Molly loved her music. It was part of her gay, artistic self, and in an odd way, just as wild—as mysterious. As privileged visitors, Betty and Pam had often been admitted to Molly's little den behind the café. There, seated on a low stool with her mandoline, Molly's sweet contralto voice followed the haunting melody she drew from the depths of those mellow strings.

" Mystery music," Pam-the-thoughtful had called it, adding with wrinkled forehead, " Where in the

world did she get it? And why—why does Aunt Lucy sigh so deeply when she sings it?"

The café was deserted when they arrived. "Yes, it's true, my dears, dreadfully true!" Aunt Lucy answered their excited questions. "Our own sweet treasure is gone without shadow or sign of where or how. This morning, I found her room empty. Her bed had not been slept in. I searched the village, of course, and reported it to the police. They tried to make light of it—said that she'd come back. They think it's only some girlish escapade. But they don't realize," she muttered darkly. "*I* know Molly—the gipsy in her."

"The gipsy in her?" Pam's blue eyes lighted up. "I—I don't understand. How could Molly be connected with gipsies?"

The two girls faced Aunt Lucy incredulously. Betty was speechless with dismay. So Flo Barry *had* been right for once in her chatty, self-centred life. Molly *had* vanished as completely as a bursted soap bubble! Poor Aunt Lucy had verified it. Betty was far too dazed to listen as the woman chattered on. Not so Pam; they gripped her mind completely.

"Of course, you never knew," Aunt Lucy sighed wretchedly. "Molly's father had gipsy blood in him. He possessed vagabond instincts that made him restless despite his sensitive, clever nature. I always dreaded—*dreaded* that Molly should inherit that wander-fever. Now I know it's happened. She has gone, just as he went, never to come back. The night he went away is always before me; it was a night of terrible thunder and lightning when Molly was just an infant."

While Betty stared in awe, Pam did a strange thing. She reached out, and taking one of Aunt Lucy's trembling hands, patted it reassuringly.

"Please stop worrying, Aunt Lucy," she pleaded brightly. "I've a cute idea. Betty and I will find Molly for you and bring her right back here."

"*Pam!*" cried Betty, aghast, feeling that her chum was going a bit too far in trying to soothe Aunt Lucy's feelings. "Just *how* do you propose——"

"Shut your—that is, I mean, do be quiet, Bet!" Pam shot a frown towards her wide-eyed chum. "We're going to spirit Molly back home in a twinkling. So that's that!"

Aunt Lucy shook her quaint grey head. "Pray be careful, dears," she pleaded. Then turning to Pam, added, "I feel the police are the only people to deal with the matter. I can't think what is in your mind."

"Neither can I," grumbled Betty, when she and Pam were outside the café. "Pam, how could you try and spoof the poor darling like that? Find Molly, indeed! However do you propose to do that?"

"Quite easy, blockhead," returned Pam, in her cheerful, confident way. "*If* we've pluck enough to act at once—*this very day*. Do stop staring as though I were a prize freak, Bet—I tell you I'm certain I know where Molly is."

"All right, out with it," said Betty, at last feeling that Pam really had got something. After all, although Pam was rather dogmatic and cocky at times, she could spot things with her busy eyes and ears that escaped the notice of most other girls.

"Remember that trail of gipsies we spotted yesterday making their way along the coastal road towards their camping-ground on the Downs?" came Pam's tense question.

Betty nodded. Of course she remembered that little procession of brightly painted caravans with their brown-skinned menfolk, their jet-haired women, who no doubt told fortunes, their jogging nags, and barking dogs—in fact, the whole picturesque cavalcade.

She, Betty, had wanted to slip away and have her palm read. Quite impossible, of course, as they were out on a nature study expedition under the eagle eye of Miss Silver, their Botany mistress. But how—how could it possibly be connected with Molly's mysterious disappearance?

"I happened to look at Molly when the last caravan went jogging past," continued Pam. "I happened to be listening, too. But not to the jargon of the gipsies and their snapping dogs. Somebody inside that caravan was playing a violin. I caught the tune; so apparently did Molly. For she was standing there quite still, staring, for all the world like somebody hypnotized. Believe it or not, Bet, that tune was one of those haunting refrains that Molly used to play for us on her mandoline. There was a difference, though. It was soft, snatchy, as if—as if the violin player were uncertain of those dreamy chords. Molly stood there, just like a frozen image, as though a voice were calling to her. Then suddenly old Silver spotted the poor mite, piped out an order, and Molly, still looking white and startled, was bundled back into line.

"Golly!" Betty inclined her dark bob. "It's a real, honest-to-goodness clue, Pam. Didn't Aunt Lucy say that Molly has a strain of gipsy in her? And that lovely mystery music of hers. How—how strange the gipsy violinist should be playing snatches of it. Can it, in a mysterious way, be responsible for Molly's disappearance?"

Pam beamed, a flush of excitement on her cheeks. "You're getting a flash of common sense at last, Miss Doubtful," she enthused. "It is, I'll bet my best blazer. And it's up to us to do something before that poor deluded Molly of ours is gone for keeps like—like her vagabond father."

That sunny half-holiday seemed especially designed for the daring investigation Pam and Betty had decided upon. Of course, the gipsies' camp, a four-miles tramp along the coastal road, was strictly out-of-bounds.

" Have to chance that," was Pam's bold decision after they had slipped through the tall hedge encircling St. Mildred's and reached the sandy highway near the sea. " Anything to snatch the poor mite from the grip of those Romany body-snatchers and get her back nice and comfy with Aunt Lucy and her precious mandoline."

Betty shivered as she stepped out beside her enterprising friend. After all, she thought, it might only be a wild-goose chase. What proof had Pam, beyond Molly's fascinated interest in the strains of the violin inside the caravan, that the gipsies were at the back of the mystery? Well, they would soon know.

Already she could see the gipsies' camp with its lines of painted caravans on a patch of vivid green. At the back, the smoke from the camp-fires spiralled up against the shimmering sea.

Betty's eyes sparkled; it looked so cheery and romantic. She was sure the gipsies weren't responsible for " snatching " Molly and holding her here against her will.

" Wake up, Miss Day Dreams," she heard Pam's businesslike orders. " You had better creep quietly forward and use the bushes for cover while I make a detour. I'll have to keep my eyes skinned for the caravan where I heard the violin playing. It was painted red and white—I couldn't miss it. Keep cool, and be an image until I join you."

With a twinge of resentment, Betty watched Pam move off cautiously. " Bit too smart with her orders," Betty told herself. " Swank! If only I could discover something important by myself! If only I could find out whether Molly *did* come here because of that violin and the mysterious somebody who plays it! "

A hundred yards away stood a colourful gipsy " house." It was painted red and gold. A wood fire was kindled behind it, the dancing flames licking the hanging billy-can. A savoury steam drifted towards her. No doubt that of hedgehog stew or some other tasty delicacy which the gipsies were skilled in making.

Betty ventured forward, seeking a sign of life. Of a sudden it came, jerking a gasp of alarm from her quivering lips. A massive bull terrier with snapping eyes and snarling teeth had hurtled from under the caravan and was making a bee-line for her.

Limp and shivery, Betty waited for the crashing impact with those knife-edged teeth. If only she had the strength to snatch up one of those hefty stones around her and fling it at the ravenous monster!

" 'Old up, Fairy! Where's yer manners, introducing yerself to the young lady like that? "

The bull terrier stopped dead in its tracks, but its bloodshot eyes still set Betty for all the world, she thought, as though she were a dainty morsel of that hedgehog stew.

Her eyes were lifted gratefully towards the burly Romany. His beady eyes were measuring her while a grin displayed his broken, yellowed teeth.

" Well, a visitor! " He bared his jetty hair with a show of mock courtesy. " A right pretty one at that! There, don't be scared, missy. Fairy's always playful with—strangers."

Betty was so relieved that she missed the raspy suspicion in the man's last words. Her courage returned as Fairy, with a final growl, returned to the bed of dirty straw from whence he came.

The man seemed friendly enough, Betty decided quickly. Perhaps he would help her in her quest for Molly!

" I—I hope you don't mind," she ventured. " But I wonder if you've spotted a girl round here? She's a very special friend of mine."

" A girl? " The slitty eyes dropped before her direct questioning gaze. " Say, this ain't a playground, you know. We don't encourage prying school-kids, me and Fairy! What sorta girl is she anyway? "

Betty tilted her chin, and rapped out Molly's description. Although, now, it seemed sheer waste of time. It was obvious the gipsy knew nothing about her missing chum. She and Pam were chasing an illusion.

" Sorry, kid, but yer friend ain't 'ere anigh. Wot'd she be doin' 'ere, anyway? Wot made you come nosin' into the gipsies' camp? "

" There's no need to get huffy about it," Betty returned spiritedly. " There was a jolly good reason to come here looking for her. She loves music. Isn't it possible that somebody here plays the violin—somebody whose music attracted her? "

It was a random shot: Betty waited. Would it succeed? Would the gipsy admit that there was a violinist among them—somebody who played that haunting music which fascinated Molly?

For a moment, the man's thin mouth was a tight trap. Then he snapped, " Of all the bunk! " He flickered a nasty-looking knife from the back of his belt and tested the point with his thumb. " Ye'll be asking me next if I've a durned jazz band 'ere. Ye'd best scram before I poke a kick at Fairy. 'E supplies the only music 'ere."

Betty backed away as the scowling Romany looked significantly from the sleeping Fairy to his knife and back again.

At that moment came a sudden crash. There was a loud hiss from the fire behind the caravan

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sign of life, the only movement the wavering flames of the dimming camp fires.

"That's the caravan where I heard Molly singing!" Pam crouched back in a shadowed patch and jabbed out a finger towards the dark shape looming up against the starry sky. "I know it by its queer scrolls. Hang on here, Bet. I'll try to get a peep inside."

She darted towards the caravan before Betty could reply, and mounting the narrow step, she silently tried the door. It was locked, but Pam's keen ears caught a rustle from within.

"Who's there?" Molly's voice was tremulous as it reached her.

Pam wanted to whoop with joy. She and Betty had found their chum! But the hardest task still lay before them. To get Molly back to poor Aunt Lucy before the gipsies had a hint of their intentions.

"It's Pam and Betty come to lug you out of this ghastly mess," Pam whispered through the keyhole. "Can you unlock the door?"

"No!" came the breathed answer. "Big Pete pocketed the key after locking me in. He's been drinking all the evening so he's probably sleeping in the next-door van. Say, Pam, you'd better scoot before they grab you too."

"Nothing doing," Pam retorted resolutely. "We're sticking by you now, whatever happens. Chin up. I'm going to get the key."

Pam tripped softly down the steps. Rejoining Betty, she quickly whispered what had happened. "The key's our only hope," she stressed. "Come on. We must get it."

Betty stealthily followed her chum towards "Big Pete's" caravan, her eyes shooting from left to right. Trying to steal the key from the sleeping gipsy, however drunk he might be, certainly was the riskiest move of all. But upon it, Molly's fate depended.

"The door's wide open," Pam's hushed tones disclosed. "What luck. You keep your eyes skinned, Bet, while I get busy inside. Pete the Gipsy's snoring his ugly head off."

Like a shadow, Pam ventured into the caravan. Its compact interior was palely clear in the moonlight which streaked in through the door and window. Then her high hopes dropped to zero. Big Pete, the heftily built gipsy who had scared Betty that afternoon, was sprawled across the small bed, his head resting upon his coat; evidently he had peeled it off for a pillow before he had subsided into his discordant slumber. Of course, Pam told herself miserably, the key was inside one of that coat's pockets. And the chance of rescuing Molly was as remote as reaching for the moon.

Of a sudden Pete stirred, with a growl that turned Pam's heart to water. She saw his heavy eyelids lift to disclose glowering pupils in the semi-darkness. Could he see her crouching behind the door? For a dreadful instant, she expected him to leap up; expected to feel those powerful hands descend upon her. But he gave another mightier grunt and buried his head more deeply into the pillowed coat. In a flash Pam was outside. She was torn between relief at her narrow escape from discovery and the gnawing defeat of her brave expedition. If only she had that key!

Then she was staring in astonishment towards the narrow steps of the other caravan. Betty's hand was on the door-knob. She was turning it, and it was—opening!

Pam darted over to her friend. "How in the world did you do it, Bet? Don't tell me that you've suddenly become a witch!"

"Witch nothing!" Betty retorted scathingly, adding with becoming pride, "Just a bit of common sense, my child. Struck me when I was waiting for you just now that the key stuck in the door of the other caravan might fit this one, too. They looked alike. So I grabbed it, and, well—it worked!"

"You priceless treasure!" Pam's admiration was sincere. "You *are* waking up!"

The next moment, they were inside the caravan with Molly. Even in the dim light they could see that she was wan and rumpled.

"You *are* bricks, running all these risks for me," she said, as Pam gave her a hug and Betty clasped her hands.

"We must leave here instantly," urged Pam. "We promised Aunt Lucy that we'd rescue you, and we've done it—almost."

Molly sank down limply on the tiny bed and shook her curls. "I must—*must* wait. Oh, don't think I'm ungrateful, but I can't leave here yet."

A gasp broke from Betty. What had come over their chum? Why was Molly so sad and changed?

"I know!" Betty looked at Pam, and nodded slowly several times. "She's hypnotized after all. That mystic music; the mysterious fiddler and Pete the Gipsy, have bewitched her."

Molly tossed her head. "Of all the rubbish! The fiddler, as you call him, wouldn't harm a caterpillar. He plays most lovely music, and believe it or not, his face is unbelievably like a photo back in Aunt Lucy's bedroom. Remember when we were out on that nature study expedition with Miss Silver?"

"I'll say," endorsed Pam. "When we passed the gipsy caravans, you suddenly became all dopy at the violin playing."

"Dopy, my bonnet!" scorned Molly. "I was just astonished. It was the same music that I'd played on my mandoline; the tunes I'd learnt from the faded sheets that I'd had as long as I remember. It was so queer; I had to follow the

THEY WERE STARING INTO A WHITE, THIN FACE.

gipsies when school was over. I found the violinist and we became fast friends. But it was Pete the Gipsy who made me stay after I'd sung for the violinist."

"Of all the puzzles!" Pam's brow wrinkled. "And where's your mysterious violinist now?"

"He went off early in the evening," explained Molly, "with Pete's fortune-telling wife, and Fairy, the dog who does tricks."

"Tricks!" echoed Betty, recalling her narrow escape from the sharp teeth of the bull terrier. "Some tricks!"

"You *must* come back with us, Molly," urged Pam. "Think of all we've risked to find you. Think of Aunt Lucy!"

"Don't I know!" Molly sighed. "Don't I realize how kind and thoughtful you all are and I'm grateful. But I can't—*mustn't* leave here until I've seen Gordio, the violinist. He has a faraway look in his eyes and his music is mystic. Oh, Pam, I've a feeling that he's——"

"Quick, quick!" Betty's voice cut in shrilly, snapping off Molly's stumbling attempts at explanation. The door of the caravan was closing. Betty reached it with a cry of horror, just as the key which they had carelessly left outside, clicked in the lock. "That blighter, Pete," she cried. "He's put one over on us after all!"

Pam could have kicked herself. If she hadn't been so over-confident, she told herself, she would have realized that wily Pete had seen her when she tiptoed into his caravan to prig the key. She remembered his eyes like live coals in the darkness. So he *had* spotted her crouching behind the door, and, biding his time, had cunningly followed her here to discover what she was up to.

Betty's hammering on the door was muffled by other sounds. The chatter of gipsies, the whinny of a horse, and creaking shafts. Then after moments of suspense came the rattle of wheels which set the small compartment swaying, and the caravan started moving.

"The beasts!" Pam ejaculated. "We're trapped like mice!"

"We'll be expelled from St. Mildred's," declared Betty gloomily. "For now there's no doubt that our night's truancy from the dormitory must be discovered."

An hour, which seemed more like ten to the cooped-up girls inside the creaking caravan, crept by.

Suddenly they stopped and held their breaths, not knowing what horrible development to expect. Footsteps fell upon the narrow steps outside; the key clicked in the lock and moonlight streamed inside as the door banged open.

"Come along, yer set o' prying sparrers!" Pete commanded harshly. "We ain't fixing yer wid these comfy lodgings for the night. There's a nice little roost out 'ere for yer till yer friends find yer. And that won't be till we are miles away. It'll teach yer not to go round pryin' inta gipsies' affairs."

The "roost" proved to be a disused barn near a ruined farmhouse. Pete and two other men bundled the shivering chums down the steps, across a stretch of sticky mire and into their ramshackle prison. Molly was last to leave the caravan; she was looking back the way they'd come. In a queer way she had come to love the camp because of the friendly gipsy, Gordio, and the music that he played.

The caravan had disappeared into the darkness before a word was uttered. "That's that!" gritted Pam. "We're dumped right in the middle of a smelly old swamp. What a picnic!"

Betty subsided on to a pile of straw. The next moment, she sprang up, yelling. Something squeaked as it went scurrying away.

"Rats!" Pam shuddered. "At least we won't be lonely!"

"It's all my fault!" Molly was almost sobbing. "If—if only I hadn't come to the gipsies' camp we'd all be safe and happy."

"Rot!" protested Pam. "You had a real reason to go back there, I'm certain. The main thing at present is getting away from here."

Betty was already aiming kicks at the decayed door which set it swaying on its creaking hinges. Of a sudden, it crashed outwards. The chums were free! But even as they took a step towards the swamp outside, a shape loomed up before them. They were staring into a white, thin face.

"Gosh, a spook!" Betty faltered, backing into Pam.

But Molly had flung herself towards the stranger. "Gordio!" she cried, relieved. "Oh, Gordio—I wanted so much to see you!"

"There, there, my dear. Everything's going to be all right. When I returned to the camp an hour ago, I found that Pete had gone off in the caravan and taken some cronies with him. I followed the wheel tracks and arrived in time to see you bundled into this barn. I had to wait, and make sure the caravan had gone before I came to free you. As we all walk back to the village, Molly, I'd like to be introduced to your friends and hear their story."

Betty and Pam were too excited for sleep that night. It seemed too good to be true that they had returned safely to St. Mildred's and removed all traces of their daring escapade without being missed. But the greatest surprise of all was in store for them when they journeyed to Aunt Lucy's café the following day.

"Gordio" was there to stay. His strange, long pilgrimage with the gipsies was ended. Aunt Lucy had recognized him as her long-lost brother; he was Molly's father, the composer of the music Molly played upon her mandoline.

It was the haunting strains of that music which very slowly revived his loss of memory. But he couldn't remember how he had come to join the gipsies years ago; or what had happened that night when the terrific storm had blacked out his mental clarity. He only knew that he had drifted along with Pete and his wife, who since had profited by his playing. He had journeyed with them from town to town until Fate had staged the reunion with his daughter.

"It was all a spiffing adventure after all," said Pam, in her serious fashion.

Betty nodded. It was impossible to voice her agreement with a mouthful of Aunt Lucy's delicious cake.

DO YOU KNOW THAT . . .

THE Laughing Jackass, an Australian bird, is a little larger than a rook? This happy little fellow has two other names—one, the Kookaburra, as he is locally known, and the other the Settler's Clock. His wild, shrieking laughter, just before sunrise each morning, makes it impossible for any lazy-bones in the vicinity to continue sleeping while he is giving his performance. In spite of this, he is a very popular bird with all, and is regarded in Australia in the same relation as the friendly little robin in the British Isles.

* * *

An unruly alligator in the New York Zoo which did great damage to his fellow alligators had to be operated on to remove his destructive teeth?

He was lassoed and tied down fore and aft, then the surgeon went to work, but only after an eighteen-inch plank was jammed into the alligator's open mouth.

First of all the surgeon sawed off the top of one of of the front teeth, then reaching deep into the reptile's mouth, he removed the molars. The operation lasted eighty-five minutes, and from that day the big alligator became a model of good conduct.

THE HAUNTED ISLAND

by JAMES JORDAN

PEGGY SET OUT ON HER DANGEROUS, MYSTERIOUS ENTERPRISE.

"GOSH, that bit of cotton clinging to that thorny bush, Nancy! It proves conclusively to me that someone besides ourselves has been prowling in this gloomy old wood. Yet only a moment ago you said this part of Malcraw Island is practically tabooed."

But slim, fair-headed Nancy Lynd gave only a careless glance at the fragment of grey cotton fluttering there from the wind-stirred twig, so eagerly pointed out by Peggy Stirling, her straight, well-built chum, that afternoon; the second on lonely but rather uncanny Malcraw Island.

"There you go, Miss Mystery," was Nancy's scornful retort. "Just because your dad's a detective, you're eternally nosing up some problem or another. Let's get out of these crazy old trees, back to the Hall, and coax cook into handing out more of that lovely ice-covered cake."

It was the girls' summer holidays from their school, St. Nicholas', on the mainland. Nancy had insisted on Peggy joining her at her recently acquired home. It would, they sadly realized, be the last chance to share holidays or even lessons together. Peggy was leaving happy but expensive St. Nicks' now the term was ended. Unlike those of more fortunate Nancy, Peggy's parents couldn't afford to keep their daughter there. The two girls had vowed to make that holiday the most thrilling affair of their friendship.

Alas, two precious days had already slipped by without even a single thrill to record, despite Peggy's never-ending efforts to smell out some sort of mystery simply because she happened to be a detective's daughter.

The dim, gloomy wood they had daringly explored that afternoon was at the tip of the island, verging down to the rugged beach with its rocks and caves. Centuries-old Malcraw Hall, once occupied by Nancy's ancestors, reared itself in the centre. It looked bleak and forbidding, although Mr. Lynd had recently gone to the expense of having it repaired and made habitable for his invalid wife, the island being ideally situated in the warm, health-giving South.

Nancy was first to reach the old-fashioned kitchen on their return through the tinted heather. Peggy

WHO HAD BEEN THERE, CATCHING THEIR STOCKING ON THAT THORNY BUSH ?

had lingered thoughtfully behind. She was convinced that the bit of grey cotton fluttering from the twig in the heart of the wood spelt some sort of mystery. Wasn't the island private property ? No one from the mainland was allowed to land without special permission. Hadn't Nancy herself said that the small staff of servants avoided the wood because it was so gloomy, so silent and unnerving ?

Who had been there, catching their stocking in that thorny bush ? And why ?

" Thank goodness there's someone bright and cheerful in this gloomy place," sighed Anne, passing the cake into eager hands. " Why ever the mistress stays here I don't for the life of me know. She's not feeling the benefit ; far from it, she's more poorly and nervous. And no wonder, considering the reputation of the place, it being haunted ! This horrible story of the—the Muttering Monk."

" Haunted ? " echoed Peggy through a mouthful of cake. " How perfectly exciting. Do tell us more, Anne."

" The Muttering Monk ! " cried Nancy in startled surprise. She had only heard vague snatches of what was called the legend of Malcraw Hall.

" You've been holding out on me, Anne, when I've every right to know all about my saintly ancestors."

Anne hesitated, after switching the cake into a cupboard lest the over-healthy appetites of her two young visitors should be further stirred.

" Really, Miss Nancy, I don't know if I'm doing right, chattering to you about the—er—ghost. But I really must talk to someone about it, 'ow this Muttering Monk comes gliding along the passages at midnight. Haven't I heard it myself, lying awake in my bed !

" And," Anne's voice became low, a shiver shaking her plump form, " you're poor mother's 'eard it, too, a-glidin' and a-mutterin' past her very door. Not surprisin' she's not getting well again. Why she doesn't leave the island I don't know, unless it's her pride, her determination to stay on after all the trouble and expense the master was put to 'aving the place put into repair."

Peggy and Nancy exchanged glances. This was indeed news, exciting news, after two thrill-less days at Malcraw Island.

" A real ghost ! " Nancy gasped. " Right under our very noses. It—it's just too marvellous ! "

Peggy, however, was again deep in thought. Anne, she decided, was trying to spoof them—or there was a first-class mystery afoot. As for ghosts, well there just wasn't, whatever superstitious people believed.

Then, before she could voice her opinion of the matter, Peggy's keen ears caught a soft, stealthy sound. Her brown eyes darted towards the kitchen window and widened. She just caught a glimpse of a scraggy figure with jet-black hair and a pale, scowling face.

It was the face and figure of Catherine Parrish, a stern, middle-aged woman hired by Mrs. Lynd as Housekeeper. "Cats," Nancy had nicknamed her, and with good reason too. Hadn't she protested against two "noisy, mischief-making children" being there on the island when madam needed calm and quietude!

"Mums, dear," cooed Nancy in her most melting way during tea that afternoon. "Do tell us the ancient legend of Malcraw Hall. Isn't there a dear, spooky old monk, or something? It's only fair I should know, this being my first visit to the island."

Peggy, seated quietly opposite her frail-looking, gentle hostess, saw Mrs. Lynd start, her lips tighten, the light of fear in her eyes. But next moment Mrs. Lynd was making a brave effort to smile at her daughter's morbid curiosity.

"Why, Nancy, you've been too busy with those sharp ears, listening to the silly chatter of Anne and that superstitious gardener, Pengelly. A spooky old monk indeed! What rubbish! I'm sure Peggy's far too sensible to heed such nonsense."

Peggy tried hard not to look guilty. Nonsense or not, she was deeply impressed by Anne's sketchy details about the supposed ghost of Malcraw Hall.

"Is there really a legend, Mrs. Lynd?" She simply couldn't hold back the question.

"There is, isn't there, Mums?" supported Nancy staunchly. "Do be a sport and tell us. I'm certain it's awfully thrilling!"

Mrs. Lynd looked, as she felt, cornered, as she rather unsteadily set down her tea-cup.

"Well, as you must know, children, yes. Of course, there are no existing records of the Lynds and Malcraw Hall, where they once lived, all being destroyed or hidden away at the time of the siege, when Oliver Cromwell's men stormed the place, the Lynds loyally supporting the ill-fated Charles the First. Your father, Nancy, learned what little is known from his father and so on down from those unhappy times."

"But what about the ancient Muttering Monk, Mumsie," persisted Nancy as her mother paused and Peggy waited eagerly, "the spooky old monk who still glides up and down the passages at midnight?"

"Absurd, you foolish child!" Mrs. Lynd was on her mettle now, determined to crush Nancy's wilful curiosity once and for all. Still it was clear to Peggy's quiet observation that her hostess was acting a part, trying desperately to cover up her own fear.

"You really must not take notice of whatever you hear about the foolish story, or I shall be forced to take Mrs. Parrish's advice and pack you both off to spend the rest of your holidays on the mainland. As for the ancient legend, I might as well tell you myself. It is said that a monk very devoted to the Lynd family was killed by Cromwell's soldiers while at prayer in the old chapel, and that since then his ghost has haunted the place, passing along the upper corridor each midnight, muttering his cruelly broken prayers. All rubbish, of course! There, now, finish your teas, and forget it."

That night, clad in pyjamas, Nancy and Peggy squatted on their beds in the room with the low ceiling which they shared, some distance from the main corridor.

"It's no use kidding ourselves," said Nancy gravely. "Mother wasn't telling the truth at tea-time. She's scared, poor dear, and didn't want to let on and leave the island after Dad's spent a lot of cash having the Hall put into repair for her sake. There is a ghost, Peg, this uncanny Muttering Monk doing his spooky stuff! It's up to us to get busy and—and—well——"

"Get to the bottom of the mystery," cut in thoughtful Peggy as Nancy's words trailed off in doubt. "It's rot, of course; the spooky part of it, I mean. Family ghosts, if ever there were any, packed up ages ago for want of superstitious asses to take notice of 'em. We've a mystery to tackle—a job of detection, my child."

With a toss of her chestnut curls Nancy sat upright. In the very face of everything she had felt a touch of pride at the possibility of having a ghost in the family, providing it was quite tame and harmless. After all, what was wrong with a nice old muttering monk? In her simple, good-natured way, Nancy saw but one duty before her: to prove to Mother, Anne, and Pengelly the gardener, that their special ghost was more fascinating than uncanny.

"Well, since that's your opinion, I'll bet my brand-new bracelet against your musty old stamp album that Malcraw Hall is haunted."

Peggy nodded her freckled face eagerly, brown eyes flashing at the challenge, the thrilling prospects of dealing with it, solving what she was convinced was no more than a material mystery, all by herself.

"Righto, as you're so ready to hand over your swanky bracelet, we'll start this very night. You can nip along and introduce your sweet, trusting

self to his nibs, the Muttering Monk. Why not take your autograph book along for his spooky signature? Golly, you would be proud!"

Nancy gasped, the warm colour gone from her cheeks.

"Idiot!" she glared back. "Since we're in it together, we'll both go. Providing you're not afraid."

This time Peggy merely smiled. She wasn't unduly afraid, but at the back of her cautious, practical mind she sensed danger which for the life of her she couldn't define. It was a kind of sixth sense warning.

"I'm game, Nancy," she agreed after a minute of awkward silence. "We'll gauge the time by your wrist-watch, and just before twelve o'clock creep along to your supposed haunted corridor. Get an eyeful of your Muttering Monk—perhaps! If we do, my precious stamp album's yours."

"You're a good sport, after all, Peg," grinned Nancy, as she set her wrist-watch on the little side table and flung her slim form back into bed.

Hours seemed to pass while the watch ticked away in the room with the low ceiling, with its dim, flickering candlelight.

Nancy's eyelids had drooped and in her kittenish way she was comfortably curled. Not so Peggy. She remained wide awake, thinking in snatches over the events of the past day. The Hall was deadly still, and from beyond its ancient walls, beyond the stretch of night-cloaked heather, she could just hear the dirge of the sea as it licked at the shingle and rocks near where that dark, gloomy wood stretched down.

Peggy's thoughts lingered on the fragment of grey cotton she had seen fluttering from the thorny twig that afternoon. Again she asked herself how it had come to be there. Again she could find no answer.

Her brown eyes flickered wide and she half sat up. Was it her fancy, or had she heard the faint throb-throb of a motor boat mingled with the distant hiss of the sea? She listened hard, but it had stopped—or it was no more than her fancy.

Peggy's thoughts drifted to Anne and her queer chatter in the kitchen that moment before the pale, soured face of Catherine Parrish had come and gone at the window. Anne with her story of the ghostly Muttering Monk! Surely it was all wild, foolish superstition.

But—but hadn't Mrs. Lynd also showed signs of fear, as if she, too, had grim reason to believe in the ghostly visitor? Hadn't Nancy's eager, persistent questions forced her mother into partial admission of the weird happenings there, at Malcraw Hall.

Stepping from her bed Peggy shot a look at the wrist-watch. Gosh, it wanted only five minutes for the tiny fingers to reach twelve!

"Wake up, slug!" She tugged at one of Nancy's slim ankles and stuck the watch before suddenly popping blue eyes. "Some ghost hunter, snoozing your head off while the Muttering Monk's warming up for his midnight stunt! We have to imitate greased lightning or miss our date with the supposed goblin."

"Golly, I was right in the middle of a lovely dream—about Anne's delicious ice-topped cake," yawned Nancy, then suddenly recalling their agreement, jerked up from the bed, "The family spook! Twelve o'clock! Ugh!"

"Scared?" purred Peggy.

"I should say not!" Nancy tilted her chin despite a little shiver. "Let's get going. The idea, scared at one's own family ghost!"

To prove her courage, Nancy led the way, quietly opening the door and tip-toeing along the narrow passages towards the main one. Peggy, who had snatched up her small flash-lamp, crept close behind.

All was still when they reached the main passage and halted. Through the slit-like window they peered forward, clearly making out the door of Mrs. Lynd's bedroom.

"Not a blessed sign of your dear, dear ghost," whispered Peggy. "What a pair of silly owls, losing our beauty sleep like this."

Nancy nodded. It was distinctly chilly in the moonlit passage after the warm, cosy little room. Far better between warm sheets resuming the dream of Anne's ice-topped cake. She half-turned to Peggy in game surrender when the old gandfather clock down in the hall commenced its hollow-toned beats. It was twelve o'clock!

Even as the last harsh beat vibrated through the building, Nancy suddenly stiffened with a tingling at the roots of her chestnut curls.

"Look!" she managed to stammer, her wide staring eyes glued to a bent shape that came slowly on along the passage. "G–o–s–h—it—it's the spook!"

Peggy had seen it already, the bent, slowly advancing shape, that of a monk, its face shrouded by the cowl of its loose, dark robe. The pale, bony hands were clasped, the sandalled feet beating dully upon the strip of carpet. As it reached the door of Mrs. Lynd's room it halted. The two staring, half-petrified girls could hear its muttering—the mumbled prayer of the ancient legend.

It was Peggy who mustered sufficient strength to dart back against the panelled wall, drawing Nancy with her into a patch of darkness.

Gone was Nancy's bravado, her boasted pride in the family ghost. She wanted only to turn and dash back to the room, lock the door against the uncanny shape out of the unknown.

But it came straight on, passing so close to the two still, breathless girls, that they could have

IT CAME STRAIGHT ON, PASSING CLOSE TO THE TWO STILL, BREATHLESS GIRLS.

reached out and touched it. Then even as they stared, it slowly faded out along the passage, seeming to dissolve into the darkness.

Peggy snapped back into action.

"Let's get a move on—after it. Can't have just vanished like—like smoke."

Nancy followed gamely enough, ashamed of her fears of a moment before. What Peggy was plucky enough to do, she could do, she told her confused self.

All wasted effort. The ghostly Muttering Monk had vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared. At the end of the long passage the youthful ghost hunters halted.

Click! Peggy switched on her torch, its thin yellow beam steadying at a door before them.

"It must have quietly nipped that way," she breathed excitedly. "Let's follow—if you've the nerve."

Nancy nodded, with a careless shrug. Not that it mattered, she thought. Ghosts just couldn't be trapped in their holes like rabbits.

A quick twist of the door-knob and Peggy led the way into a room piled with lumber. She swept the panelled walls with the thin ray of light. There was no sign of anything.

"Well, it's certainly put one over," she admitted. "But how? Simply couldn't have vanished like—like——"

"Like a regular spook?" piped Nancy airily. "That's exactly what it did do, my girl. Being a spook, the honest-to-goodness family spook, it vanished after doing its midnight prowl. You'd better get ready to hand over that stamp-album."

Peggy, however, was far from being ready to admit Nancy right in her new-found claim to a genuine family ghost.

"I still don't believe it," she declared next morning while Nancy chattered so boastfully about it. "Just you wait. There's something more significant than a spooky Muttering Monk busy on your lovely Malcraw Island. I've put on my thinking-cap. To-night we'll start investigating in real style."

Nancy blinked with a little shiver. In spite of her show of satisfaction she hadn't recovered from the shock of last night's adventure. Why couldn't Peggy dismiss the matter; admit she was mistaken. The idea of visiting again the haunted corridor wasn't, well, quite comforting. One could have too much of even a fascinating family ghost.

It was at lunch-time that Peggy became aware of Mrs. Lynd's deepened nervousness, the fact that she was even paler than usual. Something very serious was on her kindly hostess' mind. Peggy soon knew its import.

"I've thought it over carefully, children." Mrs. Lynd tried vainly to hide the tremor in her voice. "It would be much better if you leave the island." She looked from Peggy to Nancy. "Your dear Aunt Rose has the ideal place only twenty miles along the mainland. You can both have a wonderful holiday away from all this—this gloom."

Nancy's eyes widened.

"Mums, how could you suggest such a thing? I love our own dear Malcraw Island. And didn't I promise Daddy to stay here, close to you, all through the holiday break from St. Nick's."

"I'm sorry, children," came Mrs. Lynd's emphatic verdict. "You'll have to leave. Mrs. Parrish and I have had a most serious talk on the matter. Pengelly is to row her over to the mainland this afternoon, where she'll wire your Aunt Rose, Nancy. You'll both leave to-morrow, that's definitely decided."

So that afternoon the two now smileless girls stood on the tiny stone quay watching the hard-visaged housekeeper being pulled towards the mainland, honest old Pengelly, the handyman, labouring at the oars of the boat.

"'Cats' looked quite pleased with herself," said Nancy. "It's quite clear to me that she went out of her way to persuade Mother to get rid of us. The horrid old kill-joy!"

Peggy didn't appear to hear as she still stared after the boat, and the diminishing figure of Catherine Parrish.

"Dopy!" said Nancy in added indignation at her chum's seeming abstraction. "I said that 'Cats' looks quite pleased with her spiteful self. 'Spect you're too busy fretting over losing your stamp album to have heard."

"Oh, I heard all right," said Peggy mysteriously. "'Cats' is becoming more and more interesting. I've a cute idea, my child, that she has very personal reasons for wanting us out of the way."

Later that afternoon while Nancy remained close to her still obviously troubled mother, with a forlorn hope of coaxing her into changing her mind concerning the stay with Aunt Rose, Peggy slipped quietly from the Hall and hurrying across the wild stretch of heather, entered the dim, silent wood where she had noticed that fragment of grey cotton fluttering from the thorny twig. It was still hanging there. With a cry of satisfaction Peggy carefully disentangled it, studied it closely for a moment, nodded, and folded it inside her handkerchief.

For the following half an hour Peggy rambled through the trees and on to the shingle tapering out towards the mainland, her brown eyes darting right and left.

At tea-time, when she rejoined Nancy, whose puckered lips advertized her failure to coax her mother into letting them stay on at Malcraw Island, Peggy's freckled face had a flush of excitement.

But it wasn't until they'd retired to their small, low-roofed bedroom and "Cats" had returned announcing the wire to Aunt Rose duly sent, that Peggy snapped back to her active, go-ahead self.

"We've a busy time ahead, my girl." She jerked Nancy out of her sad-eyed dreaminess after quickly shutting the door. "Do stop looking like a funeral and cock those pink ears. To-night you're going to take another look at your precious family ghost—a real good look this time. I've a notion that the disappearing trick isn't so supernatural after all."

Nancy blinked hard. Then with a little sniff, she said, "So you still want to hang on to the stamp album? Fancy spending our last night at dear Malcraw spook-spying! Whatever's come over you?"

"If I'm not greatly mistaken I'll be able to tell you that later. Just you trip along to the main passage at twelve o'clock and take a real squint at your Muttering Monk."

"Indeed!" Nancy gave a contemptuous laugh. "And you'll be snuggled in nice warm sheets?"

"Sheets—that's an idea!" exclaimed Peggy as she switched over to the window and stared down at the night-dimmed lawn fifteen feet below. "They'll do very nicely for my Sherlock Holmes game to-night."

A gasp broke from Nancy as she watched her chum move to each bed in turn.

"Why, Peg, you're crazy! Our beautiful, clean sheets!"

Peggy was whipping them off the beds, knotting the corners together, measuring the flung-out length with bright, critical eyes.

"Stop glaring like a frozen owl," she returned. "While you're snooping after the alleged ghost, I'll be out under the stars, a bit of special snooping of my own. As it's quite impossible to get out without twisting graty old keys and probably alarming the household, slipping through the window and shinning down these sheets'll do the trick nicely. Of course, if you're scared of meeting your marvellous Muttering Monk on your own, coil up on a mattress and snore your dear head off."

Nancy blinked some more. Then, reaching out, pulled Peggy on to a stripped bed beside her.

"Come clean, Peg, dear. What are you up to? Something mysterious and thrilling, I'll bet."

For a moment Peggy was still and silent. Then she smiled back, and to Nancy's further surprise dug a slim hand into the pocket of her pleated skirt.

Something was pitched into Nancy's lap; something that gleamed and flickered.

"A ring!" gasped Nancy. "A marvellous, old-fashioned ruby ring! Oh, Peg, where did you get it?"

"Just picked it up while down on the shingle this afternoon, not far from the creepy wood where I spotted that bit of grey cotton yesterday. Interesting, isn't it?"

"It's beautiful!" Nancy slipped it on to a slender finger and held it up in the wagging light of the candle. "Must be as old as, well, our Muttering Monk. What a treasure!"

"Treasure!" repeated Peggy, and nodded slowly. "That's quite an idea. Maybe there is—oh, never mind now."

Again Nancy looked hard at her chum.

"Whatever are you thinking, Peg? Something frightfully exciting I'm certain."

"Mum's the word, until I'm sure," was Peggy's disappointing reply. "Meanwhile, you can help by taking another look at your dear ghost, finding out how it put over that clever fade-out."

For a moment Nancy frowned, still opposed to Peggy's doubts concerning the genuine character of her own family ghost. She softened then with a patient little smile. "All right, Sally Obstinate Holmes, have your own way. At least your supposed investigations have brought us this wonderful ring. Whoever could have lost it, there, on that lonely shingle of all places?"

"That's exactly what I mean to find out," declared Peggy grimly.

It was only fifteen minutes before twelve when Peggy set out on her daring, mysterious enterprise. She had already lowered the end of her impromptu rope out through the cautiously opened window and knotted the other end to the rail of one of the heavy, old-fashioned bed-rails.

The candle had been snuffed out, Nancy left with the torch.

"Don't forget to carry out your instructions," were Peggy's whispered words as she bobbed out of sight beyond the narrow sill, slithering downwards as if it were no more than an exercise in St. Nicks' gym.

Nancy saw her land lightly on the grass plot below, and slip swiftly away in the moonlight without a backward glance. She pulled the curtains together, marvelling at her chum's courage, still wondering to what it would all lead.

She sat down and waited, mustering her courage to revisit the haunted passage, stilling a little shiver and the temptation to stay where she was, despite her promise. Spying on the Muttering Monk alone, without Peggy's support, wasn't one bit enticing.

"Coward!" she accused herself inwardly. "There's nothing to be scared of. A promise is a promise."

Jumping to her feet she clicked on the torch and saw by her wrist-watch that it was close on twelve. She was out, creeping towards the main passage a moment later. She reached the shadowed crevice where she and Peggy had watched the Muttering Monk pass so closely the night before. She crouched back, switched off the torch, gripped it in a clammy hand, and waited.

But not for long. Up from the hall came the slow, measured beat of the grandfather clock, each harsh stroke seeming to jar at her fluttering heart.

It came then, the bent, muttering shape, slowly into the play of moonlight from the slit-like windows. At Mrs. Lynd's door again it stopped, its sibilant muttering sending an icy wave through Nancy. Desperately she fought for courage as it resumed its slow advance. To her added horror, the torch slipped from her quivering fingers, falling to the long strip of carpet which muffled the sound. But her popping eyes watched it roll right into the path of the oncoming ghost.

Click! The sandalled feet had touched it, setting it rolling afresh, this time back towards Nancy. The muttering stopped and she was sure she heard a gasp, a most unghostly gasp.

Next moment as the uncanny shape moved on towards the lumber-room at the end of the passage, Nancy followed bolstered by new courage—a sudden inrush of suspicion. Those sandalled feet were not those of a spectre. Hadn't they set the fallen torch re-rolling with a distinct "click?" Those of a real ghost, the reputed family ghost, would have passed clean through it!

The door of the lumber-room was ajar. Then Nancy reached it, clicking on the recovered torch.

She prodded open the door with a shaking hand and took one step inside. Her last movement in the night's deepening mystery. Something came down on her rumpled curls. Her knees sagged, the torch again leaving her limp fingers. Sinking with a low moan to the dusty boards, Nancy's senses went swirling away.

She was back in the low-roofed bedroom, tucked into her bed to stare first at Peggy, a smiling self-satisfied Peggy, then at Mother who, too, looked surprisingly bright and cheerful.

"There, there, you poor brave darling," said Mrs. Lynd. "Everything's perfectly right now, thanks to you and dear clever Peggy here. You've certainly earned yourselves the right to spend the rest of your holiday at Malcraw Island, after all."

It wasn't until Nancy was up, enjoying an extra serving of Anne's ice-topped cake in the sunlit garden, that Peggy related her adventures; how she had succeeded in solving the mystery.

"You see, dear," said Peggy in that wise, thought-

ful way of hers, "right from the time I spotted that bit of grey cotton on that twig in the creepy old wood, I was suspicious of something crooked afoot between there and the stretch of shingle. Then came Anne's yarn about the Muttering Monk, which you swallowed as easily as you would that cake. But while you were cocking your ears, I spotted something else."

"What was it, Peg?" asked Nancy tersely.

"The sweet-natured Mrs. Parrish eavesdropping at the kitchen window. Why? That was another puzzle. Well, the night when we agreed to visit the haunted passage I seemed to hear a motor boat approaching the island. The sound came from the stretch of shingle, close to the wood where I'd seen the fragment of grey cotton."

"Why didn't you tell me?" demanded Nancy with a little frown.

"Simply because you'd have pooh-poohed it all like you did the idea that your family ghost was just a fake. To continue the report." Here Peggy assumed all the importance of her detective father when submitting the course of some vital investigations. "Yesterday, while watching 'Cats' in the boat on her way to wire your Aunt Rose, I found my first real clue. She was wearing a grey cotton skirt."

"Gosh!" breathed Nancy. "Like that bit stuck to the twig in the wood?"

"Exactly. I put on my thinking-cap nice and tight, and nipped quietly down to the shingle, luckily to find more clues."

"That marvellous ruby ring?"

"And marks of a small motor boat having been run up close to the wood, proving that someone was sneaking on to the island during the night."

"What in the world for?" asked Nancy.

"To meet someone else, duffer, someone who had something of value to hand over secretly. The next move was to be there on the spot to see what was happening. I did it, after shinning down the knotted sheets while you were pluckily spying on the supposed spook, who was no other than dear 'Cats.' It was she who gave you that biff on the head when you so smartly nipped after her into the lumber-room before she could do her vanishing act through a sliding panel. She then joined the man who came nightly in the motor boat."

"How?" challenged Nancy. "How could she leave the Hall without being heard?"

"By a secret passage beyond the sliding panel, my girl. She confessed to it after I'd aroused old Pengelly in his hut near the orchard and caught her-red-handed in the wood where she'd left her confederate. The passage came out at what looked like an old hollow tree close to where I'd spotted the bit of grey cotton.

"But that's not all. We found the source of that old-fashioned ruby ring. A heavy chest of treasure in an underground chamber. No doubt your cautious ancestor planted it there out of reach of Cromwell's soldiers back in those stirring times. 'Cats' was getting it away bit by bit, handing it over to the man who came in the motor boat, after she'd put over the ghost business, according to the old legend, to scare your mother and the servants into staying in their rooms. They made a bad slip carelessly dropping the ring from the swag there, on the shingle, where I found it."

Nancy was so amazed that she forgot the delicious ice-topped cake. Treasure! Secret passages! "Cats" a crook!

"But," she faltered, "how did she know the treasure was there?"

"Steady on," Peggy looked blank for once. "I couldn't nose out every blessed detail. The police from the mainland are hunting for 'Cats'' confederate. You see, last night, after watching him meet the precious housekeeper, I slipped back to his boat and prigged the sparking-plug to make certain he'd stay put. We'll know the rest very soon."

A true prophecy. The man was cornered inside one of the caves before nightfall. Realizing the game was up he added his confession to that of Catherine Parrish. While working with the men Mr. Lynd had hired to put Malcraw Hall into repair, he had unearthed long-buried records of the Lynd family, the position of the hidden treasure, the sliding panel, and the secret passage.

To work warily, biding his time, was the only way to make the coup. Since he alone had the ancient records there was no fear that the presence of the treasure would be discovered by others. In Catherine Parrish, a relative who by chance had secured the position of housekeeper at the Hall, he had found a reliable ally who, on promise of a share in the proceeds of the loot, had played her cunning part.

So their holiday at Malcraw Island had proved thrilling for Nancy and Peggy after all, far more thrilling than their wildest fancy could have created. As for the treasure, when that complicated matter was settled Peggy wasn't forgotten. She returned to St. Nicks' with Nancy, who was no longer boastful on the matter of a family ghost.

THE DARK-EYED STRANGER

BY WINIFRED BEAR

CHAPTER I

IT was my special chum, Bessie Mutton, who put it into my head that the dark-eyed stranger camping out in the meadow at the back of our Horticultural College might be one and the same as the man the police were searching for in connection with a series of burglaries in the district.

She made the announcement in our bedroom one morning while the new maid, Laura, was sweeping there. A funny little thing we all thought Laura with her mop of frizzy mousy hair, greenish-grey eyes, and vivid pink cheeks. Of course, she heard what Bessie said, and seemed quite excited. "I wouldn't be surprised if you are not right, miss," she declared, shaking her frizzy mop mysteriously, "I've heard some rum stories about him in the village. He's not English, to begin with."

"Well, that's hardly his fault, and it's nothing against him, Laura!" I laughed.

Laura was dead solemn. "It isn't just that, miss; there's lots of things. The p'lice are not very sharp hereabouts, that's sure, or they'd have him up on suspect anyhow."

As we left the bedroom I said to Bessie reproachfully, "When will you learn to be discreet, old thing, I wonder? Miss Lowe would be mad if she heard you say a thing like that in front of a maid—or in front of anyone," I added, knowing how our Principal discourages gossip and rumour-mongering.

"Sorry!" said Bessie, without much concern. "I always have been impulsive, and I suppose I shall be to the end of the chapter!"

Yet you wouldn't think to look at her that she is at all like that. Her plump body, rosy cheeks, quiet brown eyes, and good-humoured smile, give the impression of a somewhat cow-like disposition. By contrast I am small and vigorous-looking, with dark bobbed hair and dark eyes—like the man the police were looking for, the mysterious stranger whose identity had been puzzling us for nearly a week, on the morning I have been telling you, about.

The following afternoon was a half-holiday. Of course, as college students we are allowed out alone—though Miss Lowe prefers us to go in pairs or small parties if we are going farther than the village. Chequers Hill is only half a mile outside, and a favourite resort of picnickers and hikers on fine summer days. Bessie and I decided that the steep climb in the heat was worth while for the pleasure of sitting down under the grove of trees at the top.

It was Bessie's birthday, and among the presents that had arrived for her that morning was a very fine leather handbag from her mother. "You are not going to take it with you this afternoon, surely?" I demanded, seeing her tuck it under her arm when we were ready to start.

"As it's a birthday present, I certainly am," she declared, with her lazy smile. "I'll take good care of it you may be sure—and not give our Dark-Eyed Stranger a chance to grab it!"

He was leaning over the gate of his camping-field when we passed it on our way to the village. It was the first time we had had such a close-up view of him, and I couldn't help thinking that he fitted very well the police's description of the man they "wanted." He was tall, above the average, slim and athletic-looking, with a slight stoop as he walked. His black hair was thick and woolly; his eyes looked black too, and were piercingly bright.

"Good afternoon," he said slowly and precisely, as foreigners do who are trying to master our difficult language.

"Good afternoon," we returned awkwardly, and hurried on

We met a number of people as we climbed the hillside path, and there were several parties at the top. A few feet down on the other side, however, we found a grassy dell, shaded by a cluster of beech trees, where we could lounge and chatter undisturbed. We had plenty of college and home affairs to talk about, and forgot our Dark-Eyed Stranger. Suddenly, however, Bessie glanced back over her shoulder, started, and pinched my arm.

"Don't look right round," she whispered. "Just twist your head a little to the right and look through the corner of your eye. You'll see *him*."

"The Dark-Eyed——?"

"Sh!"

I did as she advised. It was he right enough, sitting on a rock just below the summit, long legs astride, hands resting on the notched top of his hefty walking-stick. He seemed to be staring at us as though we were something strange and interesting.

"What do you make of him now?" Bessie whispered, all a-flutter. "I believe he followed us."

"A cat may follow a king, as well as staring at him!" I misquoted cheerfully. "Let's stare at *him* till we've stared him out."

We turned together and tried to look bold. He met our scrutiny steadily and gravely for a few moments, then stood up, bowed, smiled, and advanced towards us. Bessie remembered her new handbag which was lying on the grass beside her, and snatched it up. Of course, that drew his attention to it at once.

"It is a verry el-e-gant, what would you it call?" he enquired with a cordial smile. "A ret-icule, no?"

Bessie looked at me, blushed and giggled. I answered the question in what I hoped was a matter-of-fact tone. "I believe such bags used to be called reticules," I said. "Nowadays we generally call them just handbags."

He nodded. "They are of a size con-ven-ient for bearing in the hand, sure. But the ladies I have ob-served do not often so bear them, but under the arm which posit-i-on is surely most pre-car-ious?"

We both laughed. "It may look precarious," I admitted. "Actually it is pretty secure. You won't often see a lady drop her handbag."

"Or have it pinched," Bessie muttered *sotto voce*.

Suddenly he diverted his gaze and stared across the wide stretch of landscape below the hill: lanes, fields, hedgerows, winding streams, more hills and wooded valleys.

"It is a land beaut-i-ful, this Eng-land!" he declared with quiet rapture, while his dark eyes glowed more brightly than ever.

"You are not English?" I asked him unnecessarily.

He shook his head. "No. I from South Am-erica come for to study the people and customs Eng-lish!"

"A likely yarn!" Bessie muttered again scornfully.

He gazed at the scene for a minute or two longer, then smiled and bowed again, turned on his heel, and quickly disappeared over the crest of the hill.

Bessie turned to me swiftly. "Well?"

"He is much too nice to be a criminal," I declared feebly.

"You are quite hopeless!" Bessie declared. "But, of course, you've fallen for the fellow, just because, in his foreign way, he's rather handsome!"

CHAPTER II

WE were returning to the college for tea the following afternoon, having spent a gruelling three hours in the kitchen-garden, when we saw over the hedge dividing our path from the main drive, the Dark-Eyed Stranger walking rapidly towards the gate. He didn't see us. He was staring straight ahead with a hurt look in his eyes and a puzzled pucker on his smooth, broad brow.

"Looks as though he called at the front door for some purpose and has been disappointed," I murmured.

"Probably he hoped to be invited to tea with Miss Lowe and the staff. He has enough cheek for anything!" Bessie retorted sarcastically.

"You are unfair to him, Bessie," I protested. "He was most courteous to us, you must admit. Of course, he can't be expected to understand the finer points of English etiquette. A good many English people don't understand them! So it is quite possible that he called on Miss Lowe, thinking it the polite thing to do."

It seemed that my guess was right. For on our way to the wash-room we met Laura, flushed and excited.

"What d'you think of this for impertinence?" she cried. "I happened to be passing through the hall about seven minutes ago, when who should I see but that shady foreign chap, right inside the front door, and staring round as though he were a blessed detective himself, instead of one a detective ought to be after! He bowed when he saw me and asked, slow and careful, as though he'd ulcers on his tongue, if this was the ladies' college, and if so, could he see the Head?

"Of course, I told him promptly she was 'not at home.' 'When will she be, miss?' he asks me then. I drew myself up haughty-like and stared at him. 'When we say "not at home" in England,' I told him, 'we mean that those you've come to see have no mind to see *you*!'"

"I don't think you should have said that, Laura," I reproved her. "If you weren't certain whether you should trouble Miss Lowe or not, you could have asked one of the maids who has been here longer."

Laura pouted, and tossed her head. "There's only Betty in just now, and I know as well as her what it's proper to do, having been in good private service before I came here. My mistress used to say, 'Use your discretion about callers, Laura. If they are the sort it's plain I wouldn't want to see, you've no need to come and ask whether I'm "at home" or not—I'm not!'"

"I don't think Miss Lowe would tell you to do that," I murmured uneasily. "Of course, it's not really my business, but——"

"No, it's not really, is it, miss?" Laura popped in pertly, swung round on her toes, and whisked off.

"I thought she was rather a nice little thing when she first came," I said to Bessie when the bedroom door was shut behind us. "I don't like her so well now. She has her knife in the Dark-Eyed Stranger, and she's bent on making mischief."

I broke off, noticing that Bessie, instead of listening to me, was turning over the contents of her top dressing-table drawer with feverish haste.

"My new handbag," she muttered. "I'm sure I put it in this drawer, and it's gone."

"Perhaps you left it on top and it has dropped down behind," I suggested, stooping to look.

It wasn't on the floor there, or anywhere; or on the bed or in the bed, or in any other drawer or cupboard. In fact, by the time the tea-bell rang we had convinced ourselves that it wasn't in the room at all.

Of course, Bessie remembered at once what Laura had said about finding the Dark-Eyed Stranger in the hall. I was just as prompt in pointing out that the most respectable English visitor, calling at a house on a summer's day and finding the front door wide open, might walk in unbidden; particularly if he rang first and was not answered.

Bessie's retort to that was, "A respectable English visitor could, without rousing suspicion: a shady foreign visitor is another matter!"

"Do you remember what was in your handbag?" I asked her.

"Not my purse, luckily," she replied. "In fact, there was nothing there worth stealing as far as I remember: only a grubby handkerchief, a few stamps, and the letter Mother enclosed with the bag. But, of course, the bag itself *is* valuable. It must have cost twenty-five shillings at least. I must get it back somehow."

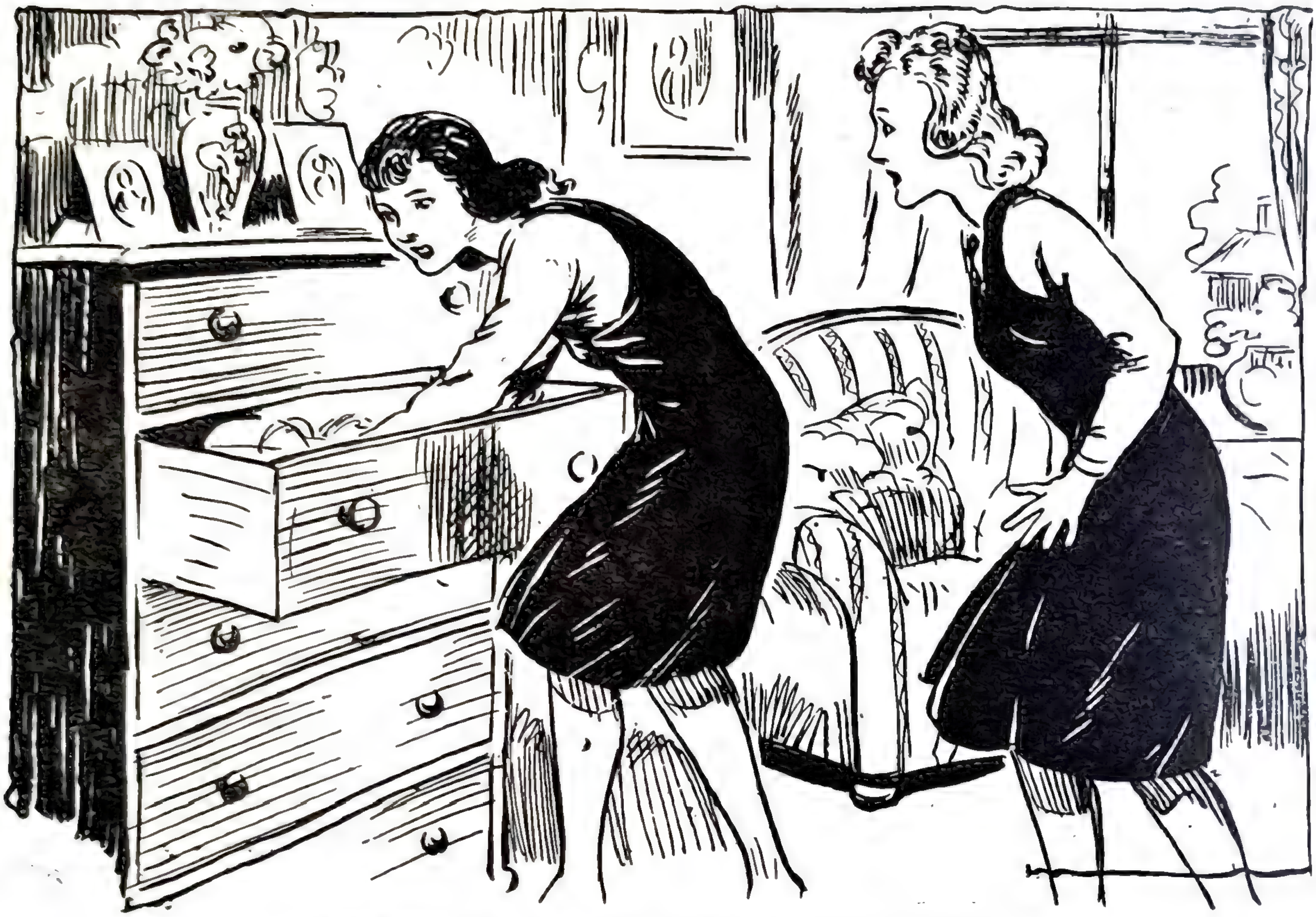
I agreed. "But don't mention to anyone that it's lost till we've had another look," I whispered. "Memory's awfully misleading. You may have left it downstairs somewhere—in the bathroom."

"Don't be silly, Vera," Bessie burst in. "What should I take it to the bathroom for, and I know that to-day it hasn't been outside our bedroom. At least, *I* haven't taken it out," she added darkly. "Still, we'll have another look there before we go to-bed, if you like. But if it hasn't turned up by to-morrow morning I shall report the matter to Miss Lowe at once. It is possible, of course, that other students have lost things too. So we'll keep our ears open for complaints."

We heard none from students—at least, I didn't, and Bessie would certainly have told me if she had. But when I went into the scullery with a basket of potatoes we had just dug, shortly before seven-o'clock dinner, I found Laura there alone. "Don't tell anyone, miss, because it may turn up," she whispered. "But I've lost a pearl necklace out of my bedroom, since I was up there after lunch. Not real pearls of course it isn't, but the aunt who gave it to me wouldn't demean herself by going to a sixpenny store. I can't help remembering that foreign fellow was in the house, goodness knows how long this afternoon before I came along and spotted him. Of course, I'm not insinooating things, miss," she added a trifle anxiously. "You won't say nothing?"

"Of course I shan't mention the matter to anyone, Laura," I assured her gravely, "and I would advise you not to tell anyone else, at present anyway. It may turn up, as you say."

I kept my word utterly: I didn't even tell Bessie.



"I'M SURE I PUT IT IN THIS DRAWER, AND IT'S GONE."

But I went to bed with a troubled mind, our final search for the missing handbag having proved conclusively that it had gone.

Bessie was disappointed, of course. But she seemed confident that it would be recovered, because, as she pointed out at least half a dozen times before she settled down to sleep, bags can't walk. If hers had not been pinched by someone inside the college, a possibility that in the circumstances, she considered, could be ruled out, then someone from outside had taken it. It was quite obvious who was intended by this "someone."

"Don't you remember how attracted he was by the bag when he slithered up to us in his sly way on Chequers Hill?" she asked me.

"It's an attractive bag," I retorted irritably, "but of no use whatever to a man, unless he sells it. And how much would he get for it if he did, do you reckon? The man the police are looking for has taken hundreds of pounds' worth in money and goods from each house he has burgled. I can't imagine the most stupid burglar risking his freedom for one handbag, however valuable."

"There wasn't much risk, as he arranged things," Bessie retorted. "Besides, we don't know yet what he has taken. When I report my loss first thing to-morrow morning, I quite expect a lot of other students will follow suit. And students who didn't know they had lost anything will discover they have, when they go to look."

"And half an hour later discover they haven't, after all," I scoffed.

This assumption of lofty scepticism unfortunately didn't take away my misgivings, with the result that long after Bessie had fallen asleep—which she did with her usual promptness—I was tossing and turning and thinking of the Dark-Eyed Stranger. "Suppose he *is* theman the police want," I thought. "Is he really a foreigner, or an Englishman pretending to be? If the latter, what's his game?"

My brain began to reel: there was a tight pain across my forehead, which the hot airless night didn't improve. I decided, as there wasn't the slightest chance of going to sleep yet awhile, to sit in the chair by the window and star-gaze. It was a perfect night for such a pastime.

I had hardly turned my eyes upwards, however, when a sound in the garden made me look down

quickly. A man's figure, dark, tall, athletic, emerged from the bushes separating the flower garden from the gravel path running round the house, and as stealthily as a cat moved towards it. He stopped close to the door leading to the kitchen premises. Suddenly another figure shot out from that direction, whispered something hastily, and shot back again. It was a small female figure.

In a flash I thought I saw the whole nefarious plot. The Dark-Eyed Stranger had visited the college that afternoon by previous arrangement with Laura. They had fixed to-night for the burglary; but Laura hadn't been quite sure then at what place she could most safely admit him. Now she had told him where there was a window unfastened, ready for him to climb through. He would not be long doing it. . . .

I shook Bessie. "Wake up, wake up!" I cried in a loud whisper. "There's a burglar breaking into the college!"

She rubbed her eyes sleepily, stared at me for a minute or two in a dazed sort of way, then enlightenment dawned on her face and she sprang out of bed.

"The Dark-Eyed Stranger. I knew it!" she cried.

"Don't be too sure!" I told her. But, alas! even to my own ears my tone lacked conviction. "We'd better sound the burglar alarm quickly," I declared, "then ring the police."

"Or shall we ring the police first?" Bessie suggested. "If he hears the alarm he'll be gone like a shot and they may not get him at all."

"Well, perhaps if we do it quickly," I said, dashing back to the window. He had gone, of course, but I wanted to make sure.

I streaked through the bedroom door, Bessie at my heels. The telephone was in the office on the ground floor, two flights of stairs below. We were there in a couple of minutes. The door was ajar; I pushed it open silently; saw a pin-point of light in one corner—the corner where the money safe was. I pushed Bessie back into the corridor. "We are too late: he's here," I whispered. "Better sound the alarm."

I thought we had made no sound at all. But professional burglars, I suppose, develop an abnormally sharp sense of hearing. Suddenly I saw his figure in the doorway, the light patch made by the large square window opposite showed it up. His stillness and silence terrified me. I put my trembling hand round the door-frame, fumbled till I felt the electric switch, and pressed it down.

We all blinked in the sudden dazzling light. Then the burglar snarled, plunged forward, grabbed me with one hefty arm, while his other hand was pressed tightly over my mouth, but not before I had seen his dark, coarse ugly face, and realized that whoever he was, he was *not* our Dark-Eyed Stranger!

Bessie screamed and disappeared. A minute later the burglar-alarm went off. At precisely the same minute the window flew open and lightly as a leaf, agile as an accomplished acrobat, the Dark-Eyed Stranger jumped through it and landed neatly on the carpeted floor. In two strides he was across the room. The burglar turned, gasped, and let me go. The Dark-Eyed Stranger took him lightly by the shoulders and flung him to the floor. Then, still without hesitation or uttering a sound, he knelt astride him, pressing him down with his big, graceful hands, and staring at him with his bright, stern eyes.

His voice, however, when he spoke at last was hardly different from that in which he had addressed Bessie and me on Chequers Hill.

"I think, sir," he said, "that even in Eng-land which is a countree verry free it is not permiss-ible for to climb through windows of ladies' colleges and to break open the places secret where the money is kept."

Until he mentioned it, I had not noticed that the safe was open. I pulled myself together, and trying to look cool and efficient, strode across to the telephone and called up the police.

CHAPTER III

THEY arrived while students and staff, roused by the alarm, were running up bewildered and excited to enquire what had happened. There were two constables and an inspector. The latter, after a short examination of the accused man, declared that he was the one being searched for in connection with the previous burglaries. My evidence was wanted, of course, and much as I hated doing it, I felt bound to mention the female figure who had run up to the burglar outside the college.

The inspector scribbled quickly into his notebook, then stopped and surveyed me keenly.

"Any suspicion of the female's identity, miss?" he enquired.

I hesitated. "Well, I have," I admitted at last, and having gone so far told him about Laura's attitude towards the Dark-Eyed Stranger and her eagerness to fasten suspicion upon him. I felt beastly, you can imagine, when she was called forward and questioned; and when she burst into tears and confessed that she had helped the burglar, I had the familiar longing for the floor to open and swallow me.

Apparently the wretch met her one day when she was out alone and talked to her in a friendly way about her home and family. She told him

THE DARK-EYED STRANGER JUMPED THROUGH THE WINDOW.

that her father kept a small farm which—owing to his ill-health—was in a bad way. As a result the family income had fallen very low, and she had a delicate little sister who needed plenty of nourishing food. The man promised to give her twenty pounds to spend as she liked if she would help him burgle the college. She closed with the bargain, intending to give it all to her family.

At that point she stopped, overwhelmed by her sobs. The kindly inspector patted her on the shoulder.

"You did very wrong, miss, of course," he said gravely. "But when the magistrates hear what you wanted the cash for, I don't think they'll come down too hard on you. It would be different if you'd planned to spend it on yourself."

"B-but I d-did take something for myself," Laura burst out, turning her blotched swollen face towards Bessie. "But it's safe in my room, miss," she told her. "I haven't done it no harm."

Bessie, looking as hot and guilty as though she were the major offender, murmured something that I am sure no one could catch, but which sounded kind and forgiving. The inspector passed on to the Dark-Eyed Stranger who had been deep in conversation with Miss Lowe.

He left ten minutes later, having bade us all "Good-night, lad-ies," in his grave, courteous, everyday voice, accompanied by a bow. When he had gone Miss Lowe said with a smile, "Probably none of you have heard of Pedro Ossegna, the South American philosopher and writer. He is making a six-months' tour of England to collect material for a book on the English people. In its English translation, which he has already arranged for, the book will be called *The English as I Found Them.*"

Miss Lowe paused and looked particularly at Bessie and myself. "He has promised to send a signed copy for the college as a whole: and two others for the students who were so courteous to him on Chequers Hill, and helped him catch the burglar."

THAT COUNTRY COUSIN

by DORIS M. WALTERS

. . . A SUPPRESSED TITTER COULD BE HEARD FROM THE GROUP OF INTERESTED ONLOOKERS.

THE little railway station of Millcawny had an unusually busy atmosphere. The customary dreary silence was swept away by the buzz of young voices. The dullness of the surroundings was cheered by the presence of a group of schoolgirls. About a dozen there were, and all chattering as hard as they could go.

One of them, a dark, pretty girl, seemed to be the centre of the crowd. The scowl on her face was most unusual but very definite.

" Yes, she is a first cousin of mine, but we never have had much to do with each other. I told you she lives in Yorkshire, didn't I ? "

" Yes, Nora, you did. But what did you say her name was ? "

" Pat Lynch. Patricia Lynch to be exact, but she is always called Pat, I believe."

" Why haven't you been pally with her, Nora ? " A plump girl looked at Nora Reeves curiously. " You are generally so friendly with everyone you know."

" Well, Mary, there is no real reason I suppose. She lives right out in the country and she is so dull. You know, stodgy somehow. Not clever at anything, games, lessons, not even good at talking, and that's most unusual in our family ! Not a bit like the rest of us ! " She paused, then added hastily, " Of course I don't know her awfully well, I suppose, so it's hardly fair for me to criticise."

" Hark ! The train is signalled—there goes the bell, so we shall soon be able to judge this cousin of yours for ourselves."

" Cheer up, Nora. Whatever she's like you still have us, you know," laughed Phyllis, one of Nora's chief friends and admirers.

" Yes, but don't forget the snag is that I have promised to look after Pat. You know, sort of befriend her, I suppose Mother means. Oh well, here comes the train. Now for the love of mike help me welcome her." Nora cast an appealing glance at her friends.

The train chug-chugged into the station. A few doors opened, and they soon spotted the much discussed cousin. Somehow there was no mistaking her. For one thing there was a definite family likeness to Nora. Yet you couldn't possibly describe this girl as pretty. She was rather on the plump side. Her face was healthy looking but—yes, *dull*. That certainly was the word.

Pat stepped quietly from the carriage, her face lighting up when she caught sight of Nora.

" Hello, Pat. So you have reached here all right." Nora stepped forward, her hand outstretched in welcome. But her feelings quickly changed to embarrassment when Pat, grasping her hand, bent forward at the same moment and kissed her.

At once a suppressed titter could be heard from the group of interested onlookers. Fancy kissing. How awfully sloppy.

Hastily Nora withdrew her hand and began to make introductions.

" Er—well, this is Mary James. She is frightfully good at hockey. This is Phyllis Webster. She's the brainy one of the gang. Carries off most of the prizes. That freckled lass over there is Bessie Randle. She does nothing but make idiotic jokes, but somehow we always seem to laugh at them. And—oh, but you'll soon get to know their names, so I won't worry you with any more." Nora drew a deep breath then continued. " And this, my esteemed friends, is my cousin, Pat Lynch. Now I've done my duty, so for goodness' sake let's make tracks for St. Hilary's."

Nora did not wait for any remarks from Pat, or from the other girls for that matter, but led the way out of the station and into the school bus.

. . . . . .

The next three weeks passed by uneventfully enough. Pat Lynch soon fulfilled Nora's description of her. She was slow in the classroom, showed no aptitude for hockey or netball, and did not seem to bother much about joining in the general conversation. Taking her all round she was—to use Nora's words—the stodgy country cousin !

Nora and her particular pals were all very keen on athletics of any kind, and were therefore rather apt to judge newcomers mainly from the athletic point of view.

Therefore, Pat did not make at all a good impression on her school companions. The inclination was rather to laugh at her, and only her connection with the popular Nora kept her in their crowd at all.

Nora felt a little ashamed somehow, that a cousin of hers should prove so dull and unsporting; but, nevertheless, she kept her promise, and did her best to draw Pat into all the fun and activities of the " gang." Nora was nothing if not loyal.

On the Friday afternoon, a bell clanging out released the girls from their last lesson of the week.

Within a few minutes Nora and the rest of her form had made their way to the quadrangle, where Miss Bates, the sports mistress, held sway. She held a large sheet of paper in one hand and a whistle in the other. Soon she placed the latter between her lips and a shrill blast ensued.

" Right, girls. Are you all here ? Let's get on then. You understand that this is to be a cross-country run ? You will each leave here at intervals of about five minutes. You will start across the Tower field, making your way over the moor as far as Grenet's farm, and return via Brockley's lane. How and where you travel in between these points, is left entirely to each of you individually. Of course you will be timed, therefore—again of course—you will take the route between the aforementioned points that you consider the shortest. Is that quite clear ? Right. Now I will read out the order in which you will start."

Miss Bates then read from her paper a list of the girl's names. Next she produced a watch, and the first girl on the list started.

The girls broke up into little groups, and stood chatting until their turn should come and their names be called.

" You are next after me then, Pat ? " said Nora, tying the laces of her plimsoles more firmly.

" No fear of her catching you up," grinned Bessie, winking at Mary.

" No, there isn't, is there ? " agreed Pat. " I'll leave that job for you, shall I ? " she added, rather to Bessie's discomfiture.

Now, Bessie was well known for a slacker where sport was concerned, and it was almost certain she would not even *try* to make good progress. Pat's words, therefore, caused a general chuckle of amusement all round.

" Good for you, Pat—oh, look out ! My turn next." Nora pushed past the others as Miss Bates beckoned to her. " Cheerio, you others ! " In half a minute she was away, running swiftly and lightly out of sight.

. . . . . .

About twenty minutes later, Nora was running up and across the moorland, leaving the woods behind her. A little slower now, partly because the ground was somewhat boggy, but mainly owing to the fact that a heavy mist had suddenly come up and around her.

As she was approaching the stream she struck rather a bad patch of ground. She struggled on, slowing down to a gentle trot. Then as she neared the water, she put on a spurt and ran and jumped from the near-side bank.

Nora never did really know what happened. Many a time before she had cleared the same stream easily and to spare. But this time she landed with just one foot on the edge of the bank, and the other found the water. An agonising stab of pain wrenched at her ankle as she pitched backwards into the stream.

With a yelp of pain Nora grabbed at the wild plants and reeds that grew alongside. It was not deep water, and in a few seconds she had dragged herself up on to the bank once again.

But the damage was done. Her ankle was swelling with amazing rapidity. She slipped off her plimsole, only to realize within a few minutes that that was a fatal thing to do. For her ankle swelled more and more, and then she found she could not begin to get the plimsole on again.

She began to get really worried as the mist around her deepened. In her anxiety she found herself talking out aloud.

NORA PITCHED BACKWARDS INTO THE STREAM.

"*Now* what do I do? I can't walk—ouch! I certainly can't! and I can't see more than a yard or two. Is anyone else likely to take this particular route?—oh, heavens, this is agony—I bet they won't. In any case I don't expect Miss Bates will let any more start, once she realizes a mist has risen. Who came after me?—oh, Pat. Then Bessie, I believe. Goodness, not much hope of either of them getting this far! Oh dear, this is awful."

But Nora was wrong, for just at that moment she heard faint but unmistakable sounds of someone approaching.

Nora hastily dragged herself up again and tried to see through the heavy mist. At the same time she began to call out as loudly as the pain of her foot would permit her.

Pat, making her way steadily towards the cries, wondered what on earth was the matter, and who it could be calling in that dreary, pain-wracked voice. At all events, she seemed to be nearing the owner of it. Then the voice ceased—just for a minute—and when it began again it was different. And it was horrid, for now it had changed to definite groans.

Pat hurried on in her sure-footed, steady way. She came to the stream, led by the ever-clearer voice, and then she stopped dead.

There crouched Nora, the gay ever-active Nora, but now her face was heavy with pain. Her eyes lit up with relief when she beheld Pat.

"Pat! Oh, Pat! Thank goodness it's you. You don't know how glad I am you've found me. How did you do it in this horrible mist?" Nora began to cry.

"Nora, don't; please don't cry. You'll be all right now. I'll take care of you." Pat hurriedly knelt down beside her cousin, and this time Nora gladly welcomed the affectionate arm about her shoulders.

"I'm sorry, Pat, old thing. Didn't mean to be sloppy, but well, it's been pretty beastly. The pain of my ankle, this heavy mist—almost like a fog—and now it's getting dark too. Oh, I *am* relieved you are with me! Trust you to stick it out and get here even in this weather."

"Yes, the stodgy old cousin possesses strength and sturdy legs at any rate!" Pat spoke with dry humour and a twinkle in her eye as she proceeded to examine Nora's ankle.

"Oh! How did you know——?" Nora broke

off in confusion, the tell-tale red staining her cheeks.

"How did I know what you all think of me? Oh, it wasn't difficult to spot that, Nora! Besides that, some of you speak in such loud voices sometimes. However, so long as I am stodgy enough to get you back to St. Hilary's, I guess that's all that matters. Now, let's have a look at this ankle."

Pat had removed the stocking gently, and was now examining Nora's foot and leg in a most professional manner. Feeling it, gently moving it, yet all so carefully and rightly somehow, that Nora gazed at her in amazement.

"Well, I'll have to bandage it somehow, before it gets any worse." Pat sat back on her feet. "It is a pity you took off your shoe. Now what can I use for a bandage? I've a large hanky—afraid that will have to do for now."

Quickly she tore the hanky into a few strips, wetted them in the stream at their feet, and applied it firmly to Nora's ankle.

"Gosh! I never knew you understood this kind of work, Pat. You're jolly clever, you know. And it's really useful cleverness—not just like being bright at games and so on. How we have misjudged you. Oh, won't I just enjoy amazing the others with an account of all this!" Even in her distress Nora enjoyed the prospect of revealing Pat to the others as she really was. A thoroughly good sport.

At last the bandaging was complete. Pat helped Nora to her feet—or rather foot—and they struggled over to a fallen tree to sit in more comfort and decide their next move.

"Well, we can't stop here. It's getting dark already. We must get back to school somehow." Pat's eyes were peering anxiously into the mist.

"You're right, Pat. But how? that's the question. Help me up and let me try my foot again. Maybe it's better now."

She stood up with Pat's aid, and gingerly allowed a little of her weight to fall on the injured limb.

"Ouch! Oh, Pat! It's really awful. What *am* I to do? I shall never manage the walk back."

"Now don't worry, Nora. We'll get there somehow."

"There is only one thing for it, Pat. You must get off back to the school and fetch help. I shall be quite all right." Nora's voice wavered a little tremulously at the thought of being left alone, perhaps for an hour or more, whilst Pat found her way back to St. Hilary's, and found assistance. Even then, they would have to locate her again. Her face showed clearly the way her thoughts were going, and Pat hastened to check them.

"Now look here, Nora, I'm jolly well *not* going to leave you, so that's that," she said in a kind but firm voice. "There must be some other way out of the trouble. Isn't there another route? Can't we return a different way? You know the surroundings so much better than I do."

"Why, yes, of course there is! How stupid of me, Pat! Why ever didn't I think of it before? Listen! If we can manage to carry on straight up over the moor, there is a lane. Well, if we can reach that, someone is bound to come along sooner or later. In any case, when they realize something is wrong, they will send out search parties all over the place, and they'll find us easier if we are up on the road."

"That sounds the best idea. Indeed, there seems to be nothing else to try. So come on. Let's get going."

Taking her weight, Pat helped Nora to her feet once again and they began to struggle across the moor.

After a short while, however, Nora broke down again. The pain was too much, more than she could bear.

"It's no good, Pat! You go on, I shall be all right."

"Don't be so *silly*, Nora. Just as though I'd leave you. Look here, you get on my back. I can give you a piggy-back, don't you worry. I may be slow, but I'm strong. Come on, up you get!"

She bent down and insisted upon Nora taking up a position on her back. Then began the most difficult part of the journey up to the lane. It was dark, foggy, and strange ground to Pat. However, she struggled on, managing to keep herself calm and steady.

After a long time and many rests, they suddenly found they were on the cart track. The mist had nearly cleared again now, but it was very dark, and not a star to be seen.

Nora slid to the ground with a sign of relief.

"Pat, we've arrived all right. How *did* you manage it?"

"Oh, that comes of being stodgy," grinned Pat. "But the point is what is your next move?"

"Well, I don't know! I should think—hark! What's that? Surely it is someone coming along already? Rather funny, for I don't suppose they have even missed us yet——"

"Look, Nora! It's caravans, I believe. Whatever are they doing up this way?"

"It looks like gipsies. They know all sorts of unusual routes, you know. Let's stop them. Hey! Just a minute! Stop, please, will you?"

Pat ran out in front of the first caravan waving her arms vigorously. The driver, reading her signals correctly, pulled up. Pat was at his side in a second and eagerly began to speak.

"Excuse me stopping you like this. I know it must seem most dreadful cheek, but you see we are in an awful mess——"

"Well, missy, what is it you want?" The man

sucked noisily at his evil-smelling pipe as he eyed Pat shrewdly.

" Well, could you—that is—well, what I mean is, could you give us a lift ? You see my cousin over there has injured her ankle rather badly, and we want to get back to school—to St. Hilary's, that is."

Pat stopped, breathless, and waited for the man's reply which was rather long in coming. He looked at her, then at Nora, with his unpleasant eyes half closed. After a minute or two he spoke, still without removing his pipe.

" Where h'exactly is your school ? What is the nearest village to it ? "

" Millcawny," replied Pat, rather nervously eyeing the crowd of swarthy-looking gipsies that were now gathering round her. " If you could get us that far, we could phone from there for help. You would be well paid, you know."

" Millcawny ? That's about seven miles by this route. Well, all right, I'll do it. Jim ! Ben ! Help these two young gals up into the back of my van, will you ? That one over there is hurt."

Two dirty-looking individuals came forward at his command, and with their rough but efficient aid, Nora and Pat very soon found themselves inside the first caravan.

It was dark, and smelled extremely stuffy and unpleasant. The door had been shut firmly behind them, and the single window was closed.

" Gosh ! I think the first thing is to get a bit of fresh air into the place, don't you, Nora ? " exclaimed Pat, moving over to the window. " Heavens, it feels as though it hasn't been opened for years."

" Yes, and smells like it too ! " Nora's voice was full of disgust. Then she sighed. " Well, I suppose we should be full of gratitude—not criticism."

" I wonder how soon we shall get back ? " Pat sat down at Nora's side again, having at last thudded the window open. " And do you think they will have started searching for us yet ? "

" What's the time ? Your watch is luminous, isn't it ? Can you see ? "

Pat peered at her wrist-watch.

" It's—gracious ! Do you know it is nearly eight o'clock ! We must have taken ages getting to that lane."

" Well, considering you piggy-backed me most of the way, it's not surprising. I wonder you managed to keep it up all that distance. How strong you must be."

" No, just—stodgy ! " Pat grinned in the dark. She couldn't resist another little dig !

" Don't, Pat ! I feel so dreadful about our misundertanding of you. And won't I put the others right about you ? You'll be a proper heroine after this adventure ! "

They chattered on, while they bumped about on the hard floor. At first, the joy and relief of securing a lift made Nora forget her ankle to a certain extent, but after what seemed hours of discomfort, the pain became well-nigh unbearable again, and Nora began to groan softly to herself. Pat had begun to doze a little. She was very tired after her strenuous journey up to the lane. Soon she was fast asleep.

A little later on, Nora's groans penetrated her senses, and she roused with a start.

" Nora ! Your ankle. Is it so very bad ? "

" Yes, it is pretty ghastly ! Pat, surely we ought to be there by now ? "

Pat looked at her watch again.

" Yes, we certainly should be there by now. It's just gone a quarter to nine. I'm going to hang out of the window and see where we are."

Suiting her actions to her words, Pat was soon leaning out of the tiny window. A new moon was shining in spasms as the clouds passed swiftly by. Soon she slipped down by Nora once again.

" Nora, I don't know a bit where we are. It's quite unfamiliar to me."

" Help me to the window. Perhaps I'll recognise it better than you. I ought to."

She struggled to the window with Pat's aid.

" That's funny," she said. " I certainly *don't* know in the least. What's more, I don't very much like it. Let's ask."

" All right. I'll try to attract the driver's attention—Oh, perhaps I had better shut the window first. They don't seem to favour fresh air ! "

Quickly Pat jammed the window to again, and felt her way to the door. She grasped the handle and turned it, but to her surprise it would not open.

" Nora ! The door seems to be locked or something. Still, I'm going to speak to that man somehow."

She made for the end of the van beyond which the driver must be sitting, and then banged furiously on the wooden wall.

After a minute a scraping noise was heard. Then, rather to her surprise, a little panel slid—or rather scraped back—revealing a small opening immediately behind the man's head. Nora came to the point at once.

" Oh—excuse me, but would you mind telling me where we are getting to ? We expected to be at Millcawny ages before this ! "

" Now don't you get worryin', missy. You're all right with us. Just you sit down for a while."

" We have already sat down for ages," put in Nora impatiently. " Besides that, I don't recognize our surroundings in the least."

" Of course you don't, miss," came the reply, but it was a different voice this time. " You see, this is a way not known to the general public. We'll tell you when we arrive."

With that, the little sliding window was pushed

back into place, and Pat flopped down next to Nora once again.

"Well, I suppose it is all right. Perhaps gipsies *do* know of lanes that we don't? All the same, it seems a bit queer."

"Well, it's no good worrying." Nora gave a little shiver. "Let's try playing some game. A spelling bee or something. It will help pass the time."

They did start, but very soon they lapsed into a dreary silence. After a few minutes Pat jerked up and touched her cousin lightly.

"Awake, Nora?—good. I'm going to make some more inquiries. This is too ridiculous for words."

She banged on the panel for the second time. The door was opened.

"Well? What's the matter now?" growled the man.

"You must tell us exactly where we are," demanded Pat. "We must be there by now. You have been *hours*——"

"You just shut your mouth and keep yourself quiet, then no harm will come to you, my girl. See?"

Pat's jaw dropped in sheer amazement. Then all at once she realized that she had very definite grounds for her feeling of uneasiness. Something *was* wrong.

"Look here, I don't know what you are up to, but——"

"Shut up! or I'll very soon *make* you!"

"Pat!" Nora was shivering with fright as she pulled at Pat's skirt. "Pat, *please* don't say any more. Oh, *do* sit down quickly."

"I won't! I'm not going to be bullied——"

"Do you want me to come in there and tie you up—*and* shut you up?" demanded the man fiercely. "I darned soon will, if you don't pipe down. I've told you we shan't hurt you, and you'll get back home some time. Now settle down quietly for the rest of the night."

With that the opening began to disappear once more, but not before Pat, thinking and acting swiftly, had popped her beret in between the door and the edge of the opening. It didn't quite shut.

She edged close to Nora then spoke in a whisper.

"I've stopped it closing right up. Now perhaps we shall hear something to help us."

"What things you do think of, Pat. But, oh dear! What shall we do?"

"Just let's listen for a bit." Pat sat back quietly,

"JUST SHUT YOUR MOUTH, AND KEEP YOURSELF QUIET," SAID THE GIPSY.

her hand firmly grasping Nora's, which was trembling badly. Several minutes passed very slowly, but they were rewarded for their patience. The men began to talk.

"What exactly is the big idea, Tom?" said one.

"Well, I'm not quite sure myself yet. But when a couple of wenches disappears like, someone is bound to offer a reward sooner or later." A deep chuckle followed these words. Then the other man spoke again.

"A dangerous game, Tom. The girls themselves will talk and tell the truth, you know."

Tom's amusement swiftly turned to anger, for he spoke next in a formidable kind of growl.

"You mind yer own business, Joe. I've ways and means of making them *promise* not to split on me. They're already cowed like, with just a few sharp words and a threat or two."

The men lapsed into silence again. Pat stood up, and quietly removing her beret, she managed to ease the panel door along the tiny bit necessary to close it completely.

"Well! Now we certainly *do* know." Pat's voice sounded grim.

"There seems simply nothing for it but to do as they say, does there, Pat?" Nora said between groans. "My ankle is just awful now too." She stifled a sob as an especially sharp stab of pain pierced her injured limb.

They sat silent for a few minutes. Then Pat drew a deep breath and began to speak.

"Nora, there is only one thing for it. I must escape from this caravan somehow and get back to the school for help."

"Pat! you can't! You can't possible do it. How will you get out? The men in the other caravans will see you anyway. In any case how could you ever find your way back, and cover all that distance? You must be absolutely tired out as it is."

Pat rose as she answered in a determined voice: "I'm going to get out of the window, dodge the other caravans somehow, and then I'll find my way back all right. I—well, I don't want to sound vain, Nora, but I happen to possess a rather extraordinary sense of direction, and I *know* I can find my way back to the school once I'm out in the open. And it won't be back along all these winding old lanes either. I'll find a much quicker way through the woods and over the fields. Honestly, Nora! I'll be all right, really I shall."

"Yes, but even so—what shall *I* do when they discover you have escaped?" Nora hung on to Pat's arm.

"I'm sorry, Nora, I hadn't looked at it like that, I'm afraid." Pat sighed. "No, I suppose it won't do. It wouldn't be fair to leave you to face that possibility."

"Oh, Pat, what a coward I am! And after all the chances you are willing to take too. You go, I'll be quite all right now. I'm not afraid any more. It is about time I took my share of danger too. So go on and don't worry about me. They may not look inside again as they have already ordered us to settle down for the night."

"Thanks, Nora! You are a sport. I'll get off then—if I can."

"Good luck, old thing." Nora gave her a hug. "Go to it."

Pat opened the window and peered out cautiously. It was very dark at the moment, and luckily the next caravan was some way behind. She waited a few minutes until they were just round another bend in the road, and thus out of sight of the following caravans. Then she wriggled through the tiny window and dropped quietly to the ground. Springing up again, she made one mad dive for the hedge and the sheltering trees beyond.

Then the terrible never-to-be-forgotten journey began. First of all she made her way through the narrow belt of trees. Then, stopping a moment to let her sense of direction come into play, she began the fearsome journey.

Across the heavy clinging soil of ploughed fields; through the eerie darkness of small spinneys; catching her foot first here against the root of a tree, then there in the twining meshes of a bramble. Still farther, across the bleak moors once again, with nothing to shelter her against the tearing wind and the intermittent heavy showers of rain.

Her plimsoles soon became worn through. Her feet were aching and sore. Her body, now hot with struggling through the woods, next bitterly cold when exposed to the keen wind of the open moor.

On—on—with only her tired senses to guide her, and never seeming to come upon familiar scenes.

She found a stream and crossed it. One plimsole was sucked from her foot by the swollen waters and whirled away in a second. Could it possibly be the same stream where Nora hurt her ankle? Was she at last nearing the school? Her heart beat faster at the thought. Yet the place did not seem familiar, in the brief spells when the rain stopped, and the moon peered bleakly through the heavy clouds.

Darkness again—more trees—more tumbles, until her wearied brain became numbed, her senses deadened. She even thought she heard voices—*voices*—VOICES—could it be? Oh no, it must be her imagination, brought into play by her urgent desires. Yet there it was again. It *must* be someone. She must cry out for help—let them know she was there.

But now her limbs were finally weakening and

she cried out as she fell. She struggled to fight back the faintness that threatened, tried to call again and again—then knew no more. She had fainted dead away.

Pat soon revived though, with the help of some sips of liquid that scorched her throat. She opened her eyes and saw a small crowd of girls, and her own dear sports-mistress, Miss Bates, bending over her with an anxious expression on her face.

Quickly then Pat told her tale, and as soon as the danger to Nora was realized, the return journey to the school was hastily arranged. Pat was "bandy-chaired" by couples of the searchers in turn until the school building was reached.

Then, as Pat was feeling much revived, she was helped into dry clothes, and was ready to accompany the rescue party by the time the police (who had been summoned) had arrived.

Telephone messages to the outlying villages soon ascertained in which direction the caravans were now travelling. Speedily they followed, and as dawn was breaking they suddenly came up with the gipsy tribe.

"There it is! That's the caravan, the one up at the front. Oh, Nora! Nora! are you safe?" cried Pat, in awful fear that harm might have befallen her cousin in her absence.

The door was wrenched open by the police, and there lay Nora, exhausted with pain but safe—quite safe and unharmed.

In a minute Pat's arms were round her and, laughing and crying, the two of them were safely installed in the waiting car.

. . . . . .

It was a month later. The Great Hall was crowded with girls, each straining to catch every word the speaker uttered.

"And so now to Patricia Lynch, with thanks, and admiration for her great courage, resourcefulness, kindness, and dogged determination, I have the greatest pleasure in presenting this Medal for Unprecedented Bravery, awarded by the higher authorities. The whole school is proud of you, Pat, my dear——"

Thunderous applause and full-hearted cheers drowned any further words of the Head mistress as she pinned the medal on to Pat's dress.

Pat turned, her eyes bright with happiness, and then she sought and quickly found her cousin and greatest friend—Nora.

They linked arms, and as they made their way through the madly cheering crowd, Pat whispered to Nora:

"It all sounds very brave and important, doesn't it, Nora? But we both know underneath that I'm still just that stodgy country cousin!"

DO YOU KNOW THAT . . .

WOLVES are not very courageous, as a rule, yet in winter-time when food is scarce they become very desperate and lose all sense of fear?

Hunters take advantage of the wolf's normal timidity to prevent it from stealing their game during hunting trips.

All they do is to plant a short stick in the ground beside the dead animal and attach a piece of linen to it. When the linen flutters in the wind it frightens the wolf to such an extent that he turns tail and runs.

* * *

Jackals seldom hunt prey for themselves? They are cowardly animals and would run away at the sight of a man. If a pack of jackals meet up with a wounded animal they will follow it for days, for they know it is certain to fall a victim to them in the end. Yet, they are so wanting in courage that they will not dare to attack it until death claims it. When at bay they do show determination, for their teeth are long and sharp and deliver a succession of snapping bites, like the wolf. Jackals, however, have often been domesticated; but in order to render them perfectly tame, it is essential that they should be captured while quite young.

* * *

The White Elephants of Burma are treated with great respect? Waited on by Princes and Mandarins, food is offered in gold and silver vessels. The sacred elephants are covered at nights by beautifully embroidered mosquito nets so that they may sleep undisturbed.

It used to be the custom to reward the finder of a white elephant with high rank and relief from taxation for the rest of his life. The finder also received a large sum of money.

A white elephant captured a few years ago was brought to its royal stable in a state barge, towed by silken cords.

On its arrival it was anointed with consecrated oil, gold bands were fixed on its tusks, and a golden chain hung around its neck. Following this, the populace gave homage for nine days.

A COUPLE OF COWARDS

by WINIFRED BEAR

THE BED WAS EMPTY!

"'BIRDS of a feather, cling together,'" quoted Gwenda Williams scornfully." You and Rhoda are a couple of cowards, so it's natural I suppose that you should back one another up."

Jennifer Bailey felt her body tauten, the hot blood surge into her cheeks. She controlled her anger with difficulty. "I suppose we seem cowards to you, Gwenda, because we can't swim and we are no good at games," she said quietly. "As for cricket, I have played it after a fashion since I was a little kid; Rhoda has never played. She lives in a London flat with no garden, and she is an only child."

"I guessed that," Gwenda sneered. "It's kind of you to make excuses for her, Jennifer, but the fact remains that she saw the ball spinning down the pitch towards her, was afraid it would hit her precious legs, so jumped aside and let it hit the wicket instead. Result, we lost the match against Lower 4B. That's the rub, that we, Upper 4A, all of us fourteen or fifteen, should be beaten by a team of twelve to fourteen-year-olds, and not a very bright team either."

One of Gwenda's chums who was listening spoke up. "Be fair, Gwenda; we are an absurdly small form this year—only thirteen of us—and as two have doctors' certificates excusing them from cricket, Rhoda had to play to make up the team. I'm pretty sure there wasn't one raw beginner in the Lower 4B team."

"It would be hard to find another beginner as 'raw' as Rhoda," was Gwenda's ironic retort.

For the rest of that day Rhoda Hill was paler in face and more subdued in manner than usual. Jennifer tried to cheer her up.

"It's only Gwenda who's so set against you, Rhoda. Of course they are all sorry about losing the match. I am, myself, though I think some of them take it much too seriously. It's only a game after all."

Rhoda said nothing, and Jennifer felt squashed. She supposed that Rhoda must be more badly hurt this time than she had been on the many other occasions that Gwenda had ragged her in the five weeks she had been at the school. She was small and delicate-looking with mousey, bobbed hair, pale grey eyes, and very little colour in her cheeks at any time. As far as appearance went, she and Jennifer were definitely *not* "of a feather." For Jennifer was several inches taller, dark, and chubby looking. Brought up on her grandfather's farm in mid-Sussex, she had been too far from the sea or public baths

to learn swimming, and the rough-and-ready cricket taught her by the boys on the farm was not approved of at St. Mary's Boarding School. She had never played tennis at all. Rhoda had the advantage of her there, but she was too lacking in self-assurance—at St. Mary's, anyway—to play above the "rabbit" level.

She was still quieter than usual at bedtime, but Jennifer noticed that her hurt, scared look had gone. There was a strange calm and determination about her when Jennifer popped her head between the curtains of her cubicle to say good-night."

"'Night," she answered shortly, and reached up to switch off her light.

"It's five minutes yet before lights-out time, Rhoda," Jennifer reminded her. "I'm going to finish my library book if I can."

"I'm too sleepy to read," Rhoda said, and suppressed a yawn.

"Right-o! I hope you sleep well." Jennifer felt inclined to add, "And squash your little trouble out of existence." But something in Rhoda's manner made her hesitate.

She was never one of those lucky people who fall asleep as soon as their heads touch the pillow. That night she was longer getting off than usual. Indeed, she was not sure whether she had actually been to sleep or not when she roused and heard the clock in the school hall strike eleven.

A curious feeling possessed her that there had been some disturbance in the dormitory a few minutes before. She thought of Rhoda and though she couldn't explain why, felt uneasy about her.

"Probably she has been asleep ages," she told herself. Still, no harm in making sure, if she could do it without waking anyone else in the dormitory. She took her electric torch from her bedside table and as quietly as any mouse, stole out of her own cubicle and drew aside the curtains of the one next door.

The bed was empty! There was no sign of Rhoda's day clothes on the chair by her bed. A spot of light fell on the pillow and Jennifer saw sticking out of the pillow-case a jagged edge of paper. In one stride she was by the bed, drawing out the whole piece of paper, apparently torn hastily from an exercise book. She read in Rhoda's familiar neat script:

"DEAR JENNIFER,—Have run away home. Sorry I am such a coward. You are so plucky. Thank you for helping me.—RHODA.

"PS.—I expect it will be morning before you read this. If it should be before, please don't let anyone else know till morning if you can help it."

"I won't, of course," Jennifer thought. "But if I could reach her without anyone knowing that she tried to run away, I believe I could persuade her to come back."

She thought rapidly. Assuming that she had roused a few moments—or a minute or two at the most—after Rhoda had left the dormitory, she could not be far from the school yet. Probably she intended to catch the 11.25 from Maplethorpe Station. This was the last passenger train that stopped at Maplethorpe that night, and Jennifer knew the exact time of it—as no doubt did Rhoda—because a girl in their dormitory had gone home by it a week before, having had news that her mother was seriously ill. The school was a mile and a half from the station, and it was now, Jennifer estimated, about seven minutes past eleven. Could she possibly creep out of the school and reach the station before the train left?

Luckily it was a warm summer night. She put on her black gym stockings, tucked her pyjama legs inside them, and donned her long tweed coat. Then shoes in hand she stole out of the dormitory, shutting the door noiselessly behind her, crept along the corridor, down the back staircase to the garden door. She heard a murmur of voices in the kitchen as she passed the door. The back door was locked—luckily it had no bolt. She unlocked it and pocketed the key, hoping that the servants would not go to the door again before retiring.

Three minutes later she was outside the school gate, running as hard and as quietly as she could in the direction of the town and the station. If she hadn't been so anxious about the time, she would have enjoyed the first half-mile. The second half-mile was hard going, the third almost more than she could manage at the rapid pace she was going. But she was still determined to keep it up if she possibly could. For if she didn't, the train would certainly be gone. She heard it puffing into the station while she was still a hundred yards from the entrance. It was hardly puffing more than she was herself.

The booking-hall at last. "Ticket, miss!" shouted the man at the barrier, gripping her arm as she hurtled herself through it. She broke away and ignoring his vehement protest dashed along the platform, staring feverishly into every compartment.

In the fifth she saw Rhoda, sitting white and scared on the edge of the seat facing the engine. By good luck there was only one other passenger—an old lady sound asleep.

As the train began to chug out, Jennifer wrenched open the compartment door and, grabbing the astonished Rhoda by the arm, pulled her towards the platform. Rhoda, indeed, was too astonished to offer any resistance until she saw the train going without her, then she turned on Jennifer fiercely.

"How—how dare you in-interfere!" she gulped, and burst into tears.

A porter strode up, glaring at Jennifer. "Did I see you pull that young lady out of the train?" he demanded. "What's the idea?"

Jennifer tried to look sheepish. "She wants to go to London," she explained, "and I thought she was in the wrong train. She says she knows it was the right one——"

"Of course it was," the porter declared, adding suspiciously, "but it strikes me as queer that such a young lady should be going to London alone this hour of the night."

"Well, she won't be now," Jennifer assured him with an easy smile. "She happens to be my best friend, and I'm taking her home with me for the night."

She linked her arm in Rhoda's as she spoke, and they moved together towards the booking-hall, leaving the puzzled porter to believe as much or as little as he liked of Jennifer's statement.

"You are wonderful!" Rhoda whispered admiringly. "I don't know why you took the trouble to chase after me, as I was such an utter coward as to run away."

"If you were an utter coward you wouldn't have dared to run away," Jennifer pointed out. "You'd have been afraid of the consequences if you were caught."

"I was," Rhoda confessed. "And I still am a bit. But I'm not sorry now that you pulled me out of the train. Mum and Dad would have been so disappointed when I told them I'd bunked off because I couldn't stand a bit of ragging. How did you get out, Jennifer?"

"By the back door," Jennifer replied.

Rhoda nodded. "So did I. It was unlocked, and of course I left the key in the lock, not expecting to return."

"Unlocked, was it?" Jennifer repeated thoughtfully. "That's funny, because it was locked when I reached there. Of course I unlocked it and brought the key so that no one inside could lock it again."

When they landed back at the school a quarter of an hour later, however, and she turned the handle of the door, it refused to yield.

"Oh dear," Rhoda faltered, then in a steadier voice, "I say, Jennifer, if we are caught I won't forget it was my fault."

"Sh, sh!" Jennifer warned, her sharp ears catching the grating sound of a key being turned in the inside lock.

Several moments passed, then the door opened slowly and a head peered round.

"Gwenda!" Jennifer exclaimed.

"Shut up!" Gwenda murmured gruffly, opening the door wider and motioning them to enter. When they had done so, she shut the door again quickly and silently, locked it, drew the key from the lock, and slipped it into the lock of the kitchen door on the other side of the passage. "You have the proper back-door key?" she whispered to Jennifer.

Jennifer nodded, drew it from her pocket, and fitted it into the back-door lock. Then, without another word, the three crept back to their dormitory, their cubicles, and their beds.

It was not till Break next morning that they had a chance to discuss the affair. Then it was Rhoda who began. "I ran away, Gwenda, because I was a coward," she explained. "Jennifer followed me and brought me back. I'm very glad that she did."

Gwenda nodded approvingly, then turned to Jennifer. "I in turn followed you, curious to see what you were up to. But I had to halt at the foot of the back stairs because, just after you shut the back door, Cook looked out of the kitchen door. '*Now*, who is it?' she declared. 'Mr. Nobody, like it was before,' I heard Mary's voice answer from the kitchen. 'If this is what comes of seeing spooky films, Cook, I'm blessed if I'll ever go with you again!' You know the door is locked this time, because you locked it with your own hand when you thought you heard someone there five minutes ago. Cook muttered something about making sure before she turned in, then shut the kitchen door again. It was then that I remembered what I discovered some time ago—that the kitchen-door key fits the back-door lock. And as the kitchen door is never locked it was unlikely, I knew, that either Cook or Mary would notice that the key was missing."

There was silence for a minute or two, then Jennifer said quietly, "What I don't understand, Gwenda, is why you should have taken all this trouble for a couple of cowards."

Gwenda flushed darkly and dropped her eyes. "That was a beastly thing to call you," she murmured, "and it's only one of the dozens of beastly things I've said to both of you since you came to the school. I—I'm sorry. I'm going to behave differently in future."

"So are we, aren't we, Rhoda?" Jennifer asked her.

Rhoda nodded. "Yes. We are going to slog in at games, Gwenda, and learn to swim. I don't suppose that I, anyway, will ever be a sport like you. But we are both going to do our best."

"You are a couple of *trumps*," Gwenda told them.

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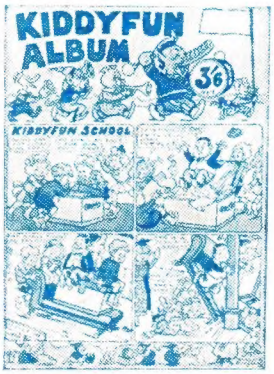

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